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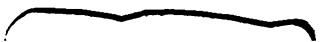
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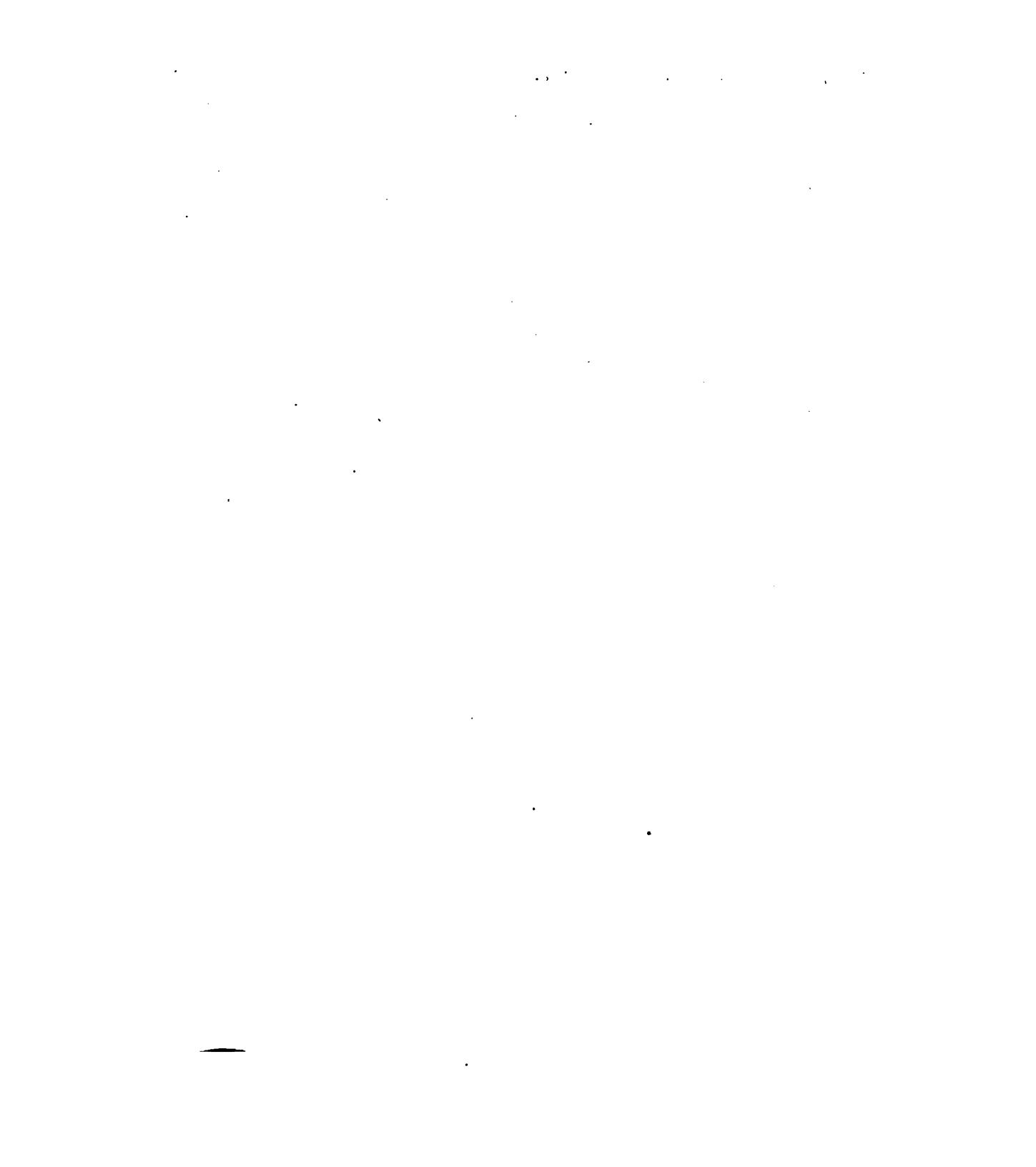
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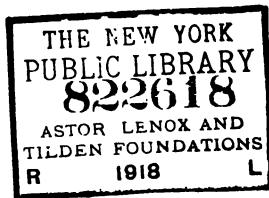
THE CAVERN KING

BY
MARY L.^{St. L.} B. BRANCH
Author of "The Kanter Girls"



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TO
MY DAUGHTER
ANNA HEMPSTEAD BRANCH

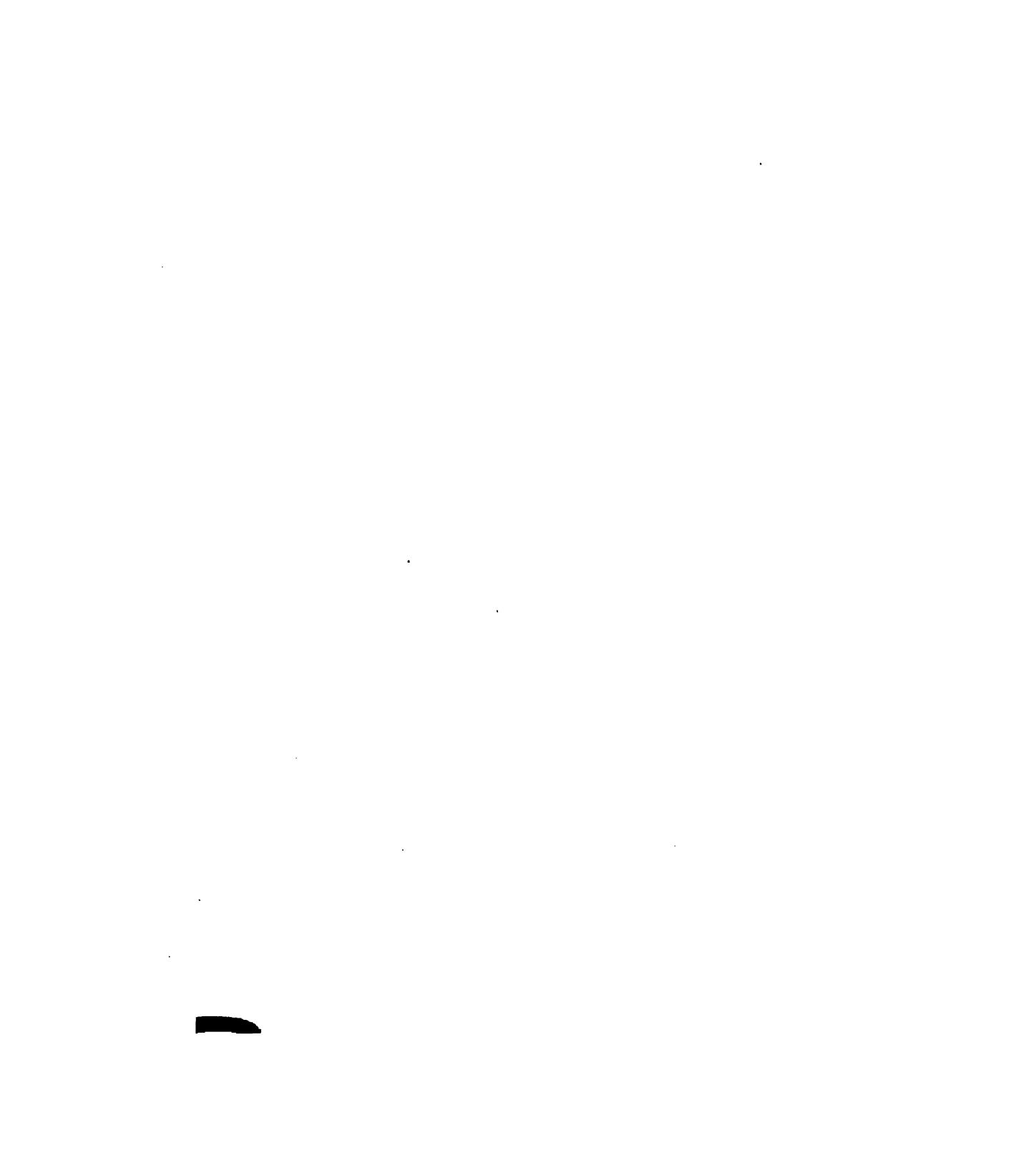
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GULD
THE CAVERN KING



CHAPTER I

LITTLE GULD

"Unto this mighty king his throne
Was born a prince, and one alone."

— EUGENE FIELD.

There was once a Cavern King who had a little son named Guld. When this king, whose kingdom was among the rocks and in deep cavernous regions underground where kobolds dwelt, was called to go to a far country, he left little Guld to be king in his place when he was grown old enough and wise enough. The kobolds agreed that they would hold together as a nation and that they would keep all the old king's laws until little Guld should come to the throne.

In the meantime, little Guld was left with his foster mother Rhea, who was loving and careful. His bed and his chair were taken into her house, which was really a wing of the royal castle, but the castle itself was closed. To her was also entrusted the king's crown, but this she hid away so secretly that nobody could guess where it was kept. The king had some ideas of his own, and one of the last things he said to Rhea was:

"Little Guld must go among the people when he

chooses, that they may not feel discontented. But there is no danger that he will want to wander much in the dark roads away from home."

"No!" said little Guld. "I don't want to go in dark roads."

So for a time he was contented. Rhea made a purple cushion for his jeweled chair and he sat by her side while she sang to him and told him stories. He liked the soft light in her rooms and he wondered why it was dark outside.

The kobolds often came to the door on one errand or another and whenever they got a peep at Guld they took off their round brown caps. Once when Gurth, the head workman, came he smiled as he took off his cap to little Guld and said:

"The light from your window makes the road brighter here."

"Then we will leave the door open too," said Guld, "and there will be more light. May we, Rhea?"

"Yes, to be sure we will, now that you have thought of it," she replied.

After that, Guld used to sit on the stone step and look out as far as the soft light reached. But on either side it seemed very dark to him, and he never could tell when a kobold was coming till he was full in sight in the dim-lit space. There was a curious interest about it, for he never knew what would happen the next instant. There might be a kobold dame hurrying along with shaded eyes and awkward curtsey, or workmen taking off their caps, or little

kobolds racing by in rude play, appearing and disappearing almost in the same moment. Sometimes he heard merry whistling in the distance, and once, but this had nothing to do with the whistling, he saw a face leering at him with a grimace while the body was hidden in the shadows.

"Who are you?" called out little Guld.

Rhea stept quickly to the door.

"Go back, Kirt!" she exclaimed in a clear, high voice. "Go back to your corners!"

"Rhea," said Guld next day, "I want you to take me through the dark roads to see my kingdom."

"Since you have thought of it we will go," she replied, looking down at him kindly.

She took a lighted lantern from the wall and gave it to Guld to carry. Side by side they entered the gloom and made their way down one of the dark roads. The walls were high on either side and arched overhead. In some places great boulders jutted out into the road, and in others there were crevices gaping wide, while yet again the space broadened and the walls became indistinct.

"I see a house now and then," said little Guld peering through the shadows.

"Yes, there is a house now and then," Rhea replied, walking swiftly on. Guld picked up a white stone he saw on the road by the light of his lantern, and ran after her.

"What road is that turning off?" he asked.

"That leads through the fields," she answered,

"and the one we passed first leads to the workshops."

"Whose house is that ahead, with the light shining out?"

"That is where Gurth lives, and we will stop there to rest."

In the house sat a plain featured kobold woman sewing on a leather jacket. She got up and curtseyed, while her two little girls, who were cutting out shoe strings, hid themselves behind her.

"Whose jacket is that?" asked little Guld.

"It is my son Peer's jacket," replied the woman.

"Where is Peer, then?" demanded Guld. "Is that he laughing through the big crack? I will go find him."

CHAPTER II

PEER

"There's no reason why kings and queens and princes shouldn't be just as neighborly as other people."

— JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS.

In a narrow, rock-bound space by the side of Gurth's house, Guld found Peer sitting on a stone where the shadows were deepest.

"I see you!" said Guld, smiling.

Peer was shy and did not know what to say to this boy smaller than himself who was yet a king's son, and who looked at him with a kind of wise friendliness. He took from his leather pocket a round stone, brown and smooth.

"I found it in the fields," he said; "you may have it if you like it."

"I do like it," said Guld, "and I will give you mine that I found on the road."

He handed the white stone to Peer and the exchange was made.

"Now," said Guld starting off and looking over his shoulder, "catch me!"

Away he ran into the road, and Peer with a laugh sprang after him. He caught him almost instantly.

Guld stopped and frowned upon Peer.

"I am the king's son," he said. "You must let me run."

"I am bigger than you," said Peer, "and I can beat any runner in your kingdom except one."

"Who is that one?" asked Guld.

Peer hesitated.

"It is Kirt," he said slowly, "but maybe you will never see him."

"I have seen him," said little Guld.

"Did he cross your path?" exclaimed Peer.

"No, he made an ugly face and ran away."

"He is one of the wicked kobolds," said Peer. "He torments and does mischief. He frightens the small ones and drives off the cattle. He digs holes in dark places where folks will stumble; he throws stones and he tells lies. He hates!"

"Is he one of my people?" asked little Guld.

"Yes, but he is one of the disobedient. You cannot make a rule but he breaks it. I heard my father, Gurth, talk about the wicked kobolds. There is a band of them. The king scattered them off into the borders, but they watch for ways to make trouble."

"And does Kirt run fastest?" asked Guld.

"Yes," replied Peer; "if he did not, I should have caught him and chained him up."

"Peer," said little Guld, "you did right to catch me. I want you to run with me every day till I grow as strong and swift as you. When I run faster than you, I can catch Kirt."

Peer did not speak at once. He was proud of being a swift runner, and he wanted to be the swiftest in the kingdom. The boy who was smaller than he and who did not run well looked up at him fearlessly.

Now Peer's father, Gurth, was not only the head workman set over the kobolds, but he was wise and steady in judgment, so that the king himself had sometimes sought his counsel, and Gurth had always been true to the king.

"I will be true to the king's son!" thought Peer, and then he said sturdily, "I am going to catch Kirt myself some day and bind him for you. But you may run with me and beat me if you can."

"Yes, I will," said little Guld. "Let me try again now up the road to the turn."

"You may start from the house-corner and I will start from the door-step," said Peer. "That's fair till you run better."

Little Guld went to the corner and said nothing, but what he thought was: "Some day he will take the corner and I will take the door-step!"

"Now!" cried Peer, and they started. Guld ran with all his might, but in ten steps Peer caught him.

"Again!" cried Guld. And again they tried and again. The fifth time Guld ran eleven steps, and the tenth time twelve steps before he was caught. Then he smiled in the most friendly manner.

"You're learning," said Peer, "you are really doing better."

Rhea now came out and called little Guld.

"Take your lantern," she said, "and we will go farther."

"What is there if we go on?" Guld asked.

"More houses where cave-people live, and then the woods and the wood-cutters."

"I would rather go to the workshops," said Guld.

"Then to the workshops we will go," said Rhea.
"Take your lantern."

"I can see without it," said Guld, "and Peer has no lantern."

"Sometimes he needs one," spoke up Peer's mother with a shake of her head.

"Peer," said little Guld as he started off, "I am coming every day to run with you!"

CHAPTER III

FROM CAVE TO CAVE

“And o'er his head the dazzling spars
Gleam like a firmament of stars.”

— WALTER SCOTT.

Little Guld and his foster-mother made their way back to the road which led to the workshops, and as they turned into it they could hear the sound of hammering. Guld quickened his steps.

“I suppose I have a great many people there,” he said cheerfully.

“Gurth can tell you,” replied Rhea; “he keeps the names and directs the work. He pays the wages.”

“When I am king I will stand by him to see it done,” said little Guld.

“That's a long look ahead,” said Rhea.

They had now come to the entrance of the main workshop where more than a hundred cave-folk or kobolds were busy, some at benches cutting stone with heavy chisels upon which they pounded. Their hammers were round stones. Others sat on the ground, smoothing the sides of rudely cut bowls and plates by grinding them with pieces of harder stone. Others were shaping knives and spoons.

No kobolds are very tall, but Gurth was something taller than the rest, and he bent over to examine each one's work. When he glanced up and saw Guld, he plucked off his cap and hastened to him. At this all the kobolds took off their caps too, except one who was working in a corner, and they looked friendly, for they were in the main good, industrious kobolds, who valued their homes and their laws and meant well by the king's son. If all the kobolds in the kingdom had been like these, no difficulties would have risen and things would have moved with the regularity of the planets till the appointed time when Guld should wear the crown. But every kobold there at work knew that when they scattered to their homes Gurth would set watchmen at the door so that no one could enter to break the knives or notch the chisels or mar the bowls or roll the hammer-stones out of sight. They knew that there were idle and mischievous kobolds, some of them living on the main roads but more in distant parts, who tried to vex and annoy, although they had promised with the rest to obey the laws.

Gurth knew more than this. He knew that there were those dwelling in the deepest darkness of the kingdom who came out only by stealth, who were even then plotting to destroy the kingdom because they had hated the king. They were so seldom seen that they were for the most part forgotten, but Gurth remembered.

Little Guld stood between his foster-mother and

Gurth and looked at the workmen with pleased eyes.

"I am their king!" he thought. Then he said: "Gurth, are the stones they work on all gray like these?"

"Commonly so," said Gurth, "but I have seen lighter."

He looked down straight into Guld's eyes.

"Do you like lighter stones," he asked, "and white, bright stones?"

"Oh! yes," cried Guld, "I do! I should like a mountainful."

"Take him into the royal cavern hall," said Gurth to the foster-mother; "he has a right to go."

Rhea was pleased that Gurth said this, and at once led little Guld away down a very dark path where the lantern ray was a good thing to have to show them where not to stumble.

When they were out of sight, Gurth stepped back into the work-room.

"Where is Rod?" he asked quickly.

"In the corner behind the stone pillar," said a sharp-voiced little kobold.

Gurth went to the corner where a shaggy browed kobold boy lay curled up as if fallen asleep at his work.

"Rod," said Gurth, "you are not sleeping. Did you take off your cap when the king's son came here?"

"No!" said Rod sullenly.

Gurth caught hold of the kobold's cap by the button on the top and pulled it off, putting it in his own pocket.

"Now work capless!" he said. "Work capless till the king's son has passed on his way home!"

Now there is that about kobolds that makes it very trying for one of them to lose his cap. Perhaps it is just a matter of public opinion among them, but a kobold who loses his cap suffers a sort of disgrace and he has to do whatever is ordered by the one who has the cap, however unwilling he may be.

So Rod went gloomily to work upon his bowl, and knew that all the kobolds there were laughing at him.

Meanwhile Rhea and little Guld followed the dark path by the light of the lantern. They had to stoop low some of the time, and it was awkward walking, but it did not last long. Then came a sharp turn and all in a moment they stood in the cavern hall arching away up over their heads in a beautiful dome, from which hung thousands of shining prisms. That is, they looked like prisms, but there is another name for them. There were lights around the hall, more than could ever be counted, they were so many times reflected upon the crystal walls.

Little Guld could not say one word at first. He looked up and down, this way and that way, but the words he knew did not seem to mean enough for him to utter them. At last he said:

"Was this my father's hall?"

"Yes, he came here often," Rhea answered gently.

"It is more to be a king than I thought it was," said Guld.

"Somewhere over on one side," said the foster-mother, "there is a great gate of rock that the king's grandfather made for his own pleasure, but it has not been moved in a hundred years, and never will be again. The one who made it used it only once when it was made."

"Did not my father, the king, open it?" asked Guld.

"No," she replied, "he was thinking of other things."

"The brightness tires my eyes," said little Guld. "Let us go home again."

So the two made their way back through the dark passage, out past the workshops, and along the road, towards home. Once there, little Guld was glad to rest in his own chair and almost fell asleep before supper was ready, for even if he was some day to be king, he was now a child, a tired child, who could not run so fast as Peer, and who had never gone alone upon a dark road. As Rhea passed and re-passed him about her work, she sang his favorite song, which began with:

"The kobolds are busy with curious things,
They have wrought in darkness a crown for kings."

CHAPTER IV

THE RACE-COURSE

“ We'll wait till we are older,
For if we went to-day,
You know that we might lose ourselves,
And never find the way.”

— KATE GREENAWAY.

But the next morning Guld was rested and eager to run again. As he stood in the doorway he saw Peer coming out from the shadow towards him.

“ Here's Peer!” he exclaimed joyously, and Rhea looked pleased. Peer took off his cap, bobbed his head, and said to her:

“ My father says I am to come every day and run with little Guld until he is swifter than I.”

“ No longer than that?” asked Guld with an odd smile. Peer laughed good-naturedly.

“ It will be longer than you think,” he said, “ but I am to come as long as you want me.”

“ That will be always,” said Guld contentedly.

“ What did Gurth say about lanterns?” asked Rhea.

“ Oh! we don't need lanterns! We can't run with lanterns!” exclaimed Guld with a frown. But she was looking at Peer.

“ Father says,” he answered, “ that it is not very

dark between this house and our house, and we must not go beyond. He knows we won't turn into darker places when we don't have lanterns. I think little Guld and I can see the road we go perfectly well. I do really!"

He looked very honest as he spoke, his cap now on his head again, and his hands in his leather pockets.

"Now!" cried Guld, and away they ran.

Up the dark road they sped, but it seemed only half dark to little Guld now. He could see all the boulders and the crevices, and could choose the smoothest part just like Peer, but Peer was well ahead and was sitting at rest on his door-step two minutes before little Guld got there.

They did not talk much, but started again, and bounded back over the same road. Peer stopped when he reached the lighted space before the door, and Guld soon came up panting.

"Don't run your fastest when you first start," said Peer, "keep a little strength for the last of it. Then you won't get out of breath so quick."

Away they went again, and Guld ran better than before, and the next time he ran better still. There was less hard work about it. He was very brave and smiling although he could not keep up with Peer. But he knew he was gaining.

"I begin to feel so much lighter!" he said, "almost as if I did not touch ground!"

"That's the right way," said Peer; "you run a great deal faster than you did at first."

Off they went again, and this time when they reached the door-step Peer said they must rest. So they sat awhile and talked.

"I don't think the road dark at all where we run," said Guld.

"Well, of course it isn't light like your doorway," said Peer, "but it is a pretty fair road, and so it is towards the fields, and towards the woods too, only the woods themselves are dark."

"Have you been to the woods?" asked Guld.

"Yes, my Uncle Bonn is head wood-cutter. He brings wood to your foster-mother for her fire. He picks out the best trees for her, sweet-scented ones."

"I have seen him," said Guld, "he does not look like the kobolds, there is another color in his face; but I like him because he smiles."

"I asked him once," said Peer, "why his face had another color from my father's, but he would not tell me."

"When I am king I will ask him, and he will tell me!" said little Guld positively.

To this Peer said nothing. He felt very sure that not even a king could make Uncle Bonn tell anything he did not wish to tell.

"Now let us run again!" said Guld.

"See how many black rocks you can count as you go by," said Peer as they got to their feet. "It is a good thing to think if you can while you run."

Off they ran, and little Guld counted every big boulder he passed.

"There are fourteen between your house and mine," he said when he reached Gurth's door, where Peer was already sitting on the step.

"That's right!" said Peer. "You are quicker than I am, counting. I ran by a good many times before I could count all in one trip. Count the cracks next time; that is still harder."

Back they ran, and little Guld not only counted the crevices but gained in his running, and was not many steps behind Peer.

"There are seven large cracks and nine small ones," he said.

"I don't see how you count so well," replied Peer. "It must be because you are a king's son."

"Maybe it is," said little Guld, "but it seems as if I did it all myself in my own head. And I know I am going to beat you running before long, Peer, with my own feet, and not because I am a king's son."

He held his head up proudly. Peer did not speak at once; he was thinking within himself that there were a great many things to be done in the cavern-world besides running and counting.

As they sat on little Guld's doorstep, a kobold came hurriedly from up the road and passed them with averted face.

"That was Rod!" exclaimed Peer. "I wonder why he has left work again. He's a mean kobold. He worked for Uncle Bonn once and cut the wood so as to make nothing but crooked sticks. He got a shaking for that."

"Where does he live?" asked Guld.

"Down one of the dark roads," said Peer. "He's Kirt's second cousin."

"I should like to go into that dark road that stretches the other way from the one where we run," said little Guld.

"Oh! no, you mustn't do that!" said Peer. "I wouldn't like to go there myself without an errand, and I am bigger than you. You are quite little yet, you know."

"I could take the lantern," said little Guld.

"I know one thing," said Peer stoutly; "you have to learn something else besides running before you go there."

"What is that?" asked Guld.

"Main strength," said Peer. "Father has workmen from down that road, and at first they made him trouble and spoiled the dishes out of spite, and were idle and hindered the others. He tried every way, till at last he had to stop them by main strength."

"Couldn't he get their caps?" asked Guld.

"Only by main strength," said Peer; "but they behave better now. How long I have been here! See, it is noon! I must go home to my dinner, and tomorrow we will run again."

"Yes, it is noon," said little Guld; "I am sorry it came so quick."

"Good-bye!" said Peer, setting off on a run.

There was a little faintly bright spot on the ground at this moment, a few steps away from the light space

before the door. Whenever this little spot came it meant noon, but it did not come every day, and when it came it staid only a very little while. Neither Gúld nor Peer knew where the brightness came from, but they knew it meant noon, and noon meant dinner time.

CHAPTER V

THE WING OF THE CASTLE

“Doors opening into darkness unawares,
Mysterious passages and flights of stairs.”

— LONGFELLOW.

As Peer disappeared up the road, Guld was about to go in where his foster-mother was singing at her work, when a new sound stopped him. There was somebody whistling cheerfully in the darkness of the road lying in the opposite direction. The sound came nearer and Guld waited. Suddenly a little kobold appeared, giving a pull at his brown cap and looking warily at Guld. He ran across to the bright spot and then turned back.

“Wait!” said Guld.

“I have to go tell the great-aunt that it is noon,” the kobold said, moving uneasily.

“What is your name?” asked Guld.

“Klein,” he replied.

He was somewhat larger than Guld. His face was dirty, and patches were needed on his leather breeches and his leather jacket. His hair was in a tangle and the button on his cap hung loose, but he had bright eyes and a pleasant little roguish mouth, always ready to whistle.

"Well, go now," said Guld, "or you will be late to dinner. You may come again another time."

Klein upon this trotted off into the shadows, and when he was well away began to whistle again.

"Come to dinner, little Guld!" called Rhea.

Guld went up the steps to his comfortable home. The door opened directly into the main room, the room he knew best of all. It was of an irregular shape with tempting corners and recesses. This came from its being originally a natural cavern, adapted by skilful masonry to the uses of a residence.

In one recess was the fire, where a few sticks were always burning, sending their own brightness into the room. The smoke curled upward in delicate, misty waves, disappearing, no one knew where, through crevices in the rocks above. There were mats on the stone floor, and a round table with plates and bowls for two. These dishes were not of stone, like those Gurth's workmen made, but were a sort of red pottery smooth to the touch. There were a few stone dishes in the room, however, very evenly ground and even ornamented a little, perhaps with a face outlined on the side, or perhaps with a wavy line. These had been made in the king's grandfather's time, and it was said that no work so fine could be done nowadays.

There was a copper kettle on the fire in which broth was steaming, and little Guld liked nothing so well for dinner as bread and broth. His foster-mother brewed a little tea for herself in a pipkin, but Guld had a drinking cup which before he sat down he filled

with clear cold water from a crystal spring which bubbled up in a corner of the room.

You see that little Guld lived very comfortably. It would be a mistake to suppose that cave-folk or kobolds could not have nice things if they wanted them enough to take pains to get them, for they are a very quick-witted people for the most part, but some of them did not care for such things, and others were too lazy to work for them.

At the back of the room there was a doorway between two gray stone pillars. This led into a better lighted apartment which was the foster-mother's, and here in some places the ceiling rose high in rifts of crystallized granite. Beyond was another doorway between red stone pillars, which led into a narrow passage on one side of which was little Guld's bedroom. There stood his bed, and in a corner of the room was a hewn stone basin always filling with fresh water.

When little Guld stood at his bedroom door, he could see that the narrow passage continued, but not straight ahead. It turned in such a way as partly to cut off the view of still another door which he never liked to see open. So always when he went to bed at night, he first made his way with his little lamp in his hand to see that the door was bolted. Sometimes, in the daytime, it was left open either by accident or on purpose by Rhea, but Guld never gave more than a glance that way. She often wondered why, since he asked so many questions about the dark roads, he did

not sometimes ask about this passage, which to her was always so pleasant.

There certainly was nothing to be seen when the farthest door stood open that could frighten anyone. All that was visible was the beginning of a flight of stairs.

CHAPTER VI

A BIT OF CAP-LEATHER

“ Mercie secure ye all, and keep
The goblin from ye while ye sleep.”

— ROBERT HERRICK.

When Guld had filled his cup at the spring and came to the table, he felt very happy, for he had so much to tell. He told his foster-mother how many times he had raced with Peer, and how fast he ran, and how well he kept his breath, and how he had counted the rocks and crevices the first time he tried, without one mistake.

“ That is very good,” she said, smiling.

But when he told her about Klein, another look swept over her face, for she distrusted the kobolds who lived down that road and she knew there were paths leading from it which went to the darkest regions of the kingdom. It seemed to her that danger lurked that way for little Guld, even on the main road by which Klein had come.

“ You must take me to see his great-aunt some day,” said little Guld.

“ Oh! no,” replied Rhea hastily. “ At least not for a long time yet! First we will go to see the wood-

cutters, and then the place where mats are woven, and then there will be market-day."

In this way she diverted little Guld's thoughts, and he sat content in his arm-chair by her side as the hours went by, asking questions and planning his next race with Peer.

"Was my father a swift runner?" he asked.

"Oh! very swift. Before he was king he used to race sometimes on market day with the strangers who came."

"Where did they come from?" asked little Guld.

"From another kingdom," said Rhea. "They always come on market day."

"Maybe Peer and I will race with them some time," he said.

"Maybe you will," she answered in an absent manner, for just then she saw a dark figure stealing up the steps and crouching in the shadow of the door-post. What did he want? Who could he be? She did not hear Guld's next question, and, indeed, he himself forgot it as soon as asked, for a strong hand flung far into the room at their very feet a strange, hideous, fluttering thing, and then steps were heard running away rapidly.

The thing was black and brown, with legs and wings, and it had teeth that showed in an ugly way. Little Guld sprang up shuddering.

"It is a bat!" said Rhea, driving it out with her rush broom and closing the door.

"Rod did that!" she said. "It is like his tricks!"

Gurth must punish him. There are no bats in our neighborhood, but they cluster in the darkest caves down the unused paths."

Little Guld looked troubled.

"I do not hate Rod," he said. "Why should Rod hate me?"

"Some kobolds are malicious," replied his foster-mother, "but you need not be afraid this will happen again. Gurth will see to it."

Guld was silent. It seemed to him that it was going to be a very long time before he should be old enough and wise enough to be a king.

Only a few minutes after this there was a loud rap on the door, and when it was opened there stood Gurth on the upper step, holding by the collar a cowering shape which was Rod himself, looking very miserable and blinking as if the light hurt his eyes.

"Speak!" exclaimed Gurth sternly.

"Wish I hadn't done it!" whimpered Rod.

"Now take off your cap, knave!" said Gurth with grim scorn; "take it off and cut out a piece of it."

With a broken knife Rod slowly and unwillingly cut a small bit of leather from the brim of his cap. This Gurth took and gave to little Guld.

"Now you are his master!" he said. "Make the rascal promise you what you like. He won't break his word as long as you own that bit of his cap-leather. It is your witness against him."

Little Guld spoke quickly:

"Promise me, Rod, never to let a bat come near our

house again, and never to let a bat come near me when I go about in my kingdom."

"I promise!" said Rod, and wriggling himself from Gurth's grasp, he fled away.

"You let him off easy!" said Gurth with a little smile. "He stumbled up against me on the road, and I held him by main strength till he confessed. He'll keep his word about the bats. But don't lose the cap-leather!"

After Gurth went, little Guld sat still, wondering whether he could have thought of a wiser thing to make Rod promise.

"But I don't believe there's a worse thing in the world than bats!" he said to himself.

CHAPTER VII

THE STONE BEADS

"A thing being unlikely is no reason for calling truthful people liars."

— JULIANA HORATIA EWING.

It is believed by some people, and so stated, that in the cavern-country the kobolds have sunlight from a sun of their own, that there are green meadows and gardens, blue sparkling streams and shining sands, just like our own, but all underground. This is entirely fanciful, and it can be seen that it is contrary to reason. The more moderate accounts are nearer the truth.

The country is underground. Its roads are formed in part of natural fissures in the geological formation of the earth, and in part are hewn out by the cave-folk themselves. Its fields and forests are mostly wide spaces, perhaps the beds left by ancient underground rivers which no longer run, or made by nature when the world was in process of cooling, as if great bubbles had hardened and left these open regions inside.

But there is no sunshine there like ours. Some of ours, indeed, may filter down through crevices or rabbit holes or by the roots of trees, but this is at best a

dim light compared to ours, and in some parts it is wholly lacking. Still they have lamplight and fire-light, and can use lanterns and torches when necessary.

Some kobolds fit up small caves as dwellings, while others take more pains and hew out stones for building. Others have log huts. A king's dwelling, instead of being a palace, is more like a castle; and if under a mountain, which is the location usually chosen, it may tower up very high.

The kobold people, or cave-folk, have cows of a grayish brown color. Some writers have made the mistake of stating that they are blue, but it is not so. They are gentle creatures, feeding in the fields. There are also a few horses, undersized it is true, but strong for drawing loads.

The trees in the forests, as a general thing, have bronze-green foliage. Besides these, there are some strange, leafless forests of roots which have struck down through the roofing of rock and earth, and, fastening in the soil below, have gone on growing. Some cave-men who build log-huts prefer to cut these roots because they need no trimming.

In Guld's kingdom any kobold who chose could have a vegetable garden in which might be raised turnips, artichokes, and in a few cases potatoes. Mushrooms were an article of food and grew in abundance. There were no stores in the kingdom, but there was a considerable traffic among the people in one way and another.

Guld's home was in the centre of the kingdom, and the cave-folk knew much more about him than he did about them. There were differing factions among them, working for divers ends. Some sought the best good of Guld and of the whole kingdom, others only cared for him as far as he might advance their own selfish aims, and others still were in downright rebellion. Many things were talked over secretly in isolated houses and in dark caves, which only a few of the loyal suspected. These few were Gurth and some of the aged counsellors. Rhea herself was influenced more by vague fears than by actual knowledge of evil when she wished to keep Guld from the road leading to the great-aunt's.

But for some days Guld asked no more questions about that road. Perhaps the remembrance of the bat deterred him, or perhaps he thought only of his races with Peer.

Day after day Peer came, and his two sisters, nice little cave-girls, Mata and Sada, who at first used to watch at the rough window-holes broken through the wall, began to follow him and to hide among the boulders so as to see the race better. They were proud of Peer, but they wished well to the king's son too.

"I mean to put little stones into Peer's shoes!" whispered Sada one day, but she never dared to do it.

With so much practice, little Guld ran faster and faster, until when Peer gained the step-stone Guld's outstretched hand touched his shoulder.

At last came the day, the glorious day, in which little Guld and Peer reached the door-post side by side, but Guld laid his hand upon it first!

"Hurrah! You did it!" piped a voice among the shadows, and as they turned quickly they caught sight of Klein's face peeping at them over a rock. But he ran off before they had time to speak to him, and when well away was heard whistling in the far distance.

Peer laughed.

"That's Klein!" he said; "he's not such a bad fellow as some of them."

"Rhea!" called Guld in the door-way, "where are you?"

She was not in the main room nor in the room beyond, but wherever she was she heard his voice, and in a moment more came swiftly out from the passage, leaving the doors open behind her in her haste, so that Guld knew she had been upon the stairs.

"What is it, little Guld?" she asked.

"I can run as fast as Peer!" he exclaimed in a triumphant voice.

"Yes, he can! He beat me!" said Peer frankly.

"Oh! then this is a great day!" she said. "I must give you something to remember it by."

She had been holding her hands behind her, but now she brought them forward, and gave to each boy a fresh red rose.

"They are roses!" she said, when they looked bewildered.

Now what do you suppose these two little caveboys did? They had never seen nor heard of roses, and did not know what it was to want roses, so after a moment of surprise and pleasure they each pulled out petal after petal, dropping them on the ground, and stood looking at the green stems. Peer tried to put back one red petal but it would not stay.

"We ought not to have done that!" he said.

"I wish we hadn't," said Guld, gathering up some of the petals in his hand.

"Never mind!" said Rhea, "you did not know what they were. It is my fault. Now I will give you something you can keep."

And she handed to each one a curiously carved blue stone bead.

"You can keep them in your pockets," she said, "they came from an old necklace."

So they put the beads in their pockets, and into Guld's pocket went the rose leaves too, which he had in his hand.

But even this did not make him want to go up the unfamiliar stairway, and that night when he went to bed he attended as carefully as ever to the bolting of the door.

CHAPTER VIII

UP THE STAIRWAY

"And up the stair, and further still, and further."
— THOMAS HOOD.

After little Guld learned to run so well, Peer did not come to the house every day, but he came very often, and while they ran fewer races they engaged in other exercises, playing hide and seek in the crevices of the rocks, moving blocks of stone with which they began to build a tower, and climbing up and down the jagged walls that defined the road. Guld's clothes soon showed signs of wear, and his red cap got many a stain from the earth and roots where he scrambled, so that it was nearly as brown as Klein's.

In fact it frequently happened that workmen going by, or kobolds abroad on errands, did not know that of the active playfellows they passed one was little Guld, the king's son.

"It is well," said Gurth, when Rhea spoke of this; "it may protect him from some of the spiteful kobolds who are always at their tricks."

But the foster-mother began to make a new gray suit and a new red cap.

Most of the kobolds dressed entirely in brown, and the material used was leather made from skins of animals, such as foxes and kine. As the native supply was small, skins were greatly in demand on market-day, and coarse woven stuffs also were shown. In very old times, it was said, bears had often forced an entrance into the caverns, and then the cave-men had gone hunting, but it was so long since this had happened that the oldest in the kingdom could not have told how a bear looked. Though so many of the kobolds preferred brown leather because it wore well, yet red and gray were kobold colors too, and more in favor the farther one went toward Uncle Bonn's forests. And another thing,—up Uncle Bonn's way there were more cave-men than kobolds, whatever the difference might be. Some of the oldest cave-men, Uncle Bonn among them, wore low-crowned hats instead of caps.

But let us return to events.

"Rhea," said little Guld one day, "Peer has not come and I think I will go to meet him. We want to climb the big boulder today."

It had chanced two or three times that when Peer did not come Guld had gone to find him, and all the road between the two houses was as safe as friendly dwellers could make it. So Rhea did not say no, and away went Guld eager to meet his playmate.

Rhea watched him out of sight and then went into her inner room, and looked through the passage at the closed door.

"I surely can go for a few moments," she said, opening the door and setting her foot on the lower stair.

She had been up that stairway again and again in old days, but hardly at all after Guld was placed in her care, for although she would have taken him with her gladly and even longed to do so, yet whenever she spoke of it he turned his back and shook his head so decidedly that she gave it up, knowing that she must not force him.

But there was the day when she had gone for a little while and brought back the roses, and ever since then she had watched for another chance.

"I am afraid I did not close the vines again," she said to herself, "and I want to smell the roses before they fade. Guld is safe with Peer. I surely can venture for once."

With a quick step she mounted the stairs which were in short flights, each new flight turning to the right. The higher she went, the more the light increased, till suddenly she reached a little room of irregular shape, with gray walls, and there the sunshine lay upon the floor, streaming through an opening which was like a narrow window, bordered with green stems and leaves.

"I did not close the vines!" she exclaimed, "it was very careless! If any of the hill-people have been abroad they must have wondered. But when I heard little Guld calling me, I could not think of anything else."

She put her hand out and gathered a rose, which she placed in her gown.

Then she pulled the stems and leaves together, drawing them close over the aperture so that the sunshine no longer fell broadly, but flickered in little drops of light.

She lingered yet a moment more, looking toward another closed door, scarcely visible in the wall.

"I should like," she said to herself, "to go on and see that all is right in the upper rooms, but no, I must not be long gone."

And with slow step she descended the stairway.

CHAPTER IX

KLEIN AND HIS PIPKIN

"But now it seemed as if he needs must wander, would he,
would he not."

— WILLIAM MORRIS.

Meanwhile little Guld, humming the words of one
of his foster-mother's songs which ran :

"When twelve blue beads hang on one strand
A queen shall come laughing to kobold land,"

hastened on to Peer's house. When he reached the door there on the steps sat the little sisters, Mata and Sada, braiding rushes. They had round, cheerful faces, and they wore demure little caps on their heads, not caps like Peer's or Guld's, but like their mother's, with strings (you see such caps in Dutch pictures sometimes), and from under the border black ringlets stole out. They looked up at Guld and both of them smiled. Their eyes were large and dark.

"We sat out here on purpose," Mata said, "for Peer thought you might come."

"He's gone!" exclaimed Sada, eager to be first to tell the news; "he's gone on an errand to Uncle Bonn."

"I wanted to go with him when he went next time! I was to go with him!" said little Guld, much disappointed.

"He told us to tell you," Mata explained, "that he is coming right back from his errand, but when he goes with you he will take more time and you can stay over night which will be better, you know, because in one day you could not see much."

"Then I must go home," said Guld, "and Peer must come when he gets back."

So he started away, and they watched him till he was out of sight. Guld felt dissatisfied, for he had expected a good time that morning, climbing and leaping with Peer, and he did not want to go into the house.

When he reached the steps he looked up, but Rhea was not in sight and he noticed that the door leading to the stairway was open. Then he glanced toward the road which he had never traveled, where the light was less than on Peer's road. He wanted very much to explore it and he had always been put off and hindered.

"I think I will go a little way," he said to himself, "and turn back after a few steps. I do want to see what is beyond that dark rock, and there is no danger on the main road. Klein told me so."

So away went little Guld where he had never been before, hesitating, curious, a little fearful, but taking one step after another till he reached a stream running out of the rocks. Here he stopped, tasted of the

water, and then stood looking about him. There were two or three small dwellings back in the shadows opposite, but no signs of life.

There is no reason, however, to believe a house to be unoccupied simply because the doors are shut and no lights burning, especially among the kobolds. In one at least of those small, rude dwellings there was repressed delight and excitement which Guld did not suspect.

He was about to turn reluctantly homeward, when he heard someone whistling in the distance.

"That's Klein!" he exclaimed, and waited.

The whistling grew louder, a little figure came in sight, and it really was Klein, with a pipkin in his hands, coming to fill it at the stream. He started in surprise when Guld spoke to him, and then he smiled.

There was something engaging about this little kobold, though neither his hands nor his face were of the cleanest, and his well worn clothing was out of repair. One of his toes showed where his shoe was broken, and nobody had yet put a patch on the knee of his trousers. But he had a light heart, and there was not one of his size who could beat him whistling, or smiling either when he chose to smile.

"I'm very glad you happened to come," said little Guld; "I was just going home. Will you go with me? We can climb up on the rocks and talk."

"I have to go right back with the pipkin," said Klein; "my great-aunt wants the water for her tea."

"Do you have to come to this little stream for all your water?" asked Guld.

"Oh! no," said Klein, "we have a water-cave, but Mog threw a toad into it just now, and my great-aunt is very angry and won't make tea with the water, though some of the boys fished the toad out and carried it away."

"What made Mog do it?" asked Guld.

"It was Hob's toad, and he's tamed it, and Hob pulled Mog's hair, so she snatched his toad. I've got to get back quick with this water."

"I'll go along with you," said Guld, "and when you have carried in the water, you can come home with me, and we will play together."

"Well," said Klein contentedly. He filled the pipkin till the water ran over on his hands, and then they started.

"It doesn't seem so very much darker down this road," remarked Guld, looking around him with great interest.

"It doesn't seem dark at all to me," said Klein, "but up where you live it hurts my eyes."

"The road is quite wide here," said Guld, "and the houses are farther back. There are not so many houses as I supposed."

"No," replied Klein, "these are fields and places where we cut roots to burn. There's a road to the right, but I don't know where it goes. I think it is deserted, it looks so rough, and I have seen foxes running over it. There's another road on the left

that is dark, really dark. My great-aunt says I have no business to go there, and she says I'll be sorry if I do, so I keep out of it. I never go far anyway, but I know I can go with you when my great-aunt hears that you live close by the noon-spot."

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT-AUNT

“ We visit for a single day,
And whether then we go or stay,
Depends on circumstances.”

— LEWIS CARROLL.

“ Home-keeping hearts are happiest,
For those that wander, they know not where,
Are full of trouble and full of care;
To stay at home is best.”

— LONGFELLOW.

So they talked as they walked, and presently came to a rough gateway where Guld stopped, while Klein ran in with the pipkin of water. There was a sound of scolding, then of low words, and Guld wished Klein would come. But instead, a voice of authority called,

“ Come in here, little Guld.”

Guld stepped forward, for he felt he must, and besides he was curious to see the great-aunt. In a minute more he was among a crowd of kobolds, all pulling their caps and bobbing their heads. The women dropped curtseys. The oldest of all was the great-aunt; Guld felt sure of that, for she had such snapping black eyes and firm lips, so he approached her.

"I am glad to see you," he said. "I mean to come some time to get acquainted, but today I want Klein to go home with me."

"You are our young king!" said the great-aunt smoothly. "It is an honor to have you under our cavern-roof. Many loyal servitors of yours bide here, who would not let you touch the common earth with your feet if they had their way."

"Oh! I like to walk and run!" said little Guld cheerfully.

"Is it a king who is speaking?" the great-aunt exclaimed. "Your people would have you sit upon a throne, and ride in a chariot, and wear your father's crown. But your faithless nurse keeps you out of your rights, and your people complain that you are naught to them."

"I mean to be a very good king to my people when I am old enough," said little Guld, "and when I am wise enough."

"Hear him!" cried the great-aunt. "You are old enough and wise enough to suit your best friends, and glad will they be to tell you so!"

With this, she lifted little Guld to a chair somewhat higher than the rest, and the kobolds pulled their caps again. Klein was not in sight; he had hidden in a corner crying, and little Guld felt lonely and anxious.

"I think I will go home now!" he said with some dignity.

"Stay with us! Stay with us!" piped the kobolds.

"Is it enough, little King," resumed the great-aunt, fixing her black eyes on his, "is it enough for a nurse and a workman and a workman's son to be the only ones out of a whole kingdom to behold their king! There are hundreds upon hundreds of your faithful subjects who serve you. It is your right to come among them; it is your right to know them and care for them."

"I do," said little Guld in a low voice; "I love my people."

"Then give us our turn!" said the great-aunt.

"Give us our turn, our turn!" piped the kobolds.

Guld's small wisdom was put sorely to the test. He felt that if the kobolds wished to see him a little longer, it would perhaps be better not to hasten away. They could not treat him unkindly when they found he tried to please them. So he reasoned.

Besides, if he refused to stay, the great-aunt, although of course she ought not to do it, might take his cap away from him and compel him to remain. He was not sure of his own power over these kobolds, and he wished, ah! how he wished, that he had the main strength Peer had spoken about. He looked around the gloomy room, now thronged with kobolds, for more had been coming every moment. He noticed the glowering fire that made the air smoky, the sputtering kettle, the grimy table, and he thought of Hob's toad.

But at last he decided on his course, and stood up

in the chair to speak. The kobolds pressed close around him, uneasy and expectant, and the great-aunt kept her eyes fixed intently upon him.

"I did wrong to come here to-day," said little Guld. "You can see I am not wise enough yet to be your king, but I expect to be wise enough sometime, and then I shall come among you a great deal. I want to go home now, but I do care for you all, and —"

Here he hesitated. The great-aunt did not once remove her eyes from his face; he could not understand her look. Then he said with his own pleasant smile,

"I will make you a little visit now. I will stay three days."

The kobolds leaped and shouted and clapped their hands. Their voices were sharp and shrill. The great-aunt wore an odd smile, and whispered to the housekeeper,

"Three days! What a child he is! Three years more like!"

But the housekeeper did not smile. She was a clumsy kobold who did the work and did not pretend to any wisdom, but if she had been alone in the cavern she would have sent little Guld home.

"Now," said the great-aunt waving her hand at the kobolds, "go back, all of you, and leave the king with me. You will see him to-morrow."

The kobolds scattered in all directions, and Guld said,

"How well they mind you!"

"They had best!" she answered him proudly; "I, too, am of royal blood, and fourth cousin to your father, the king!"

Little Guld was now resolved to make this unexpected visit with what grace he might, and to show no fear. The younger kobolds were peering at him from under the table and behind the chairs. Klein came from his corner with a doubtful look, but when Guld smiled at him, he turned heels over head for joy.

CHAPTER XI

THREE LONG DAYS

"Ay, now am I in Arden ; the more fool I ; when I was at home,
I was in a better place ; but travelers must be content."

—SHAKESPEARE.

The day wore away amid these strange surroundings. When the little kobolds were called to their dinner, Guld sat alone at the head of the table, and to him were given a larger bowl and a larger plate than to the others.

"Because he is your king," said the great-aunt impressively.

But if the size of the plate had been decided by what was eaten from it Guld would have had the smallest of all, for what with the smoky air of the cave, the uninviting table and the wondering what kind of water had gone into the making of the broth, he had very little appetite and only tasted and sipped, while the others ate eagerly. The young kobolds were very ill-mannered ; they kicked each other under the table and made faces, and sulky Mog muttered threats that disturbed her neighbors.

When the meal was over, little Guld sat quiet for awhile, and watched the great-aunt at her knitting

and the housekeeper scraping the broth-kettle. Then he said,

"Klein, I want some water. Let us go and get some in the pipkin at the stream."

The great-aunt glanced up sharply.

"The water has run clear in the cave by this time," she said; "go there, Klein, and dip out some for little Guld."

"I will go too," said Guld, getting down from his chair. "I want to see the water-cave."

"Klein!" commanded the great-aunt, "take little Guld upon your shoulders and carry him to the cave."

"I don't need to be carried!" exclaimed Guld indignantly. He heard Mog tittering in a corner as he spoke.

"A king's son must not go stumbling over the black, slippery stones," said the great-aunt.

Klein came close to Guld and whispered,

"Do just what she says. I can carry you easily and we have better times when we please her."

So Guld, against his will, climbed on Klein's sturdy little shoulders, and was carried out through the gateway, not towards home, but around the other side to some rough, black shiny steps between two rocks. Down these steps Klein went alone into a cave where there was a pool of water. The place was so dark, even for kobolds, that a lantern was kept in a crevice of the rock. In a ray from the light, two or three snails could be seen crawling over the surface of the stone.



"There's where Mog threw the toad," said Klein, "but Heft got it out with a broom. It wasn't drowned."

"Let me find where the water comes from," said Guld.

He went this side and that, and at last found a crack by which water was slowly entering. He held his hands cup-fashion and drank.

"We'll come here when we are thirsty," he said. As they went up out of the water-cave, Klein said hurriedly,

"Get on my back quick! I see Hob watching!"

"But I don't like to ride you," objected Guld.

"Play I'm a horse!" said Klein, who was the best little kobold in all that part of the kingdom.

Guld mounted, and Klein strode forth whistling, while Hob retreated out of sight.

"You are very strong," said Guld.

"Yes, I am strong," replied Klein. "Now I will take you to my playhouse."

Off he went in still another direction, and they were soon in a small stone cave, room-shaped, which Klein called his own. There were several seats of rock some of which Klein had brought there himself.

"How did you do it, all alone?" asked Guld.

"Oh! by main strength," said Klein. "The more I worked the stronger I grew. Look at that door! Do you know what there is there? There are stairs going up ever and ever so high!"

"Have you ever climbed them?" asked Guld.

"A little way, but I didn't like it. The great-aunt goes up there sometimes with her knitting, when she wants to be alone. She says there are cobwebs there."

Guld did not answer. He remembered his foster-mother's stairway and how somewhere up there roses grew. Suddenly Hob's voice was heard.

"Great-aunt wants ye," he said gruffly.

Now this is what had happened a few minutes before Hob was sent with his message. A loud ringing step was heard in the house entrance, and Gurth strode in, and demanded sternly of the great-aunt, "Where is little Guld?"

"On my premises," she replied, her eyes meeting his.

"Call him! I have come to take him home."

"Hob," said the great-aunt, "go and call your little king!"

As Hob clattered off, she said meaningly,

"Of course you will not force little Guld, if he chooses to stay."

Gurth was silent, but fear crept into his heart. Not another word was spoken till Hob returned, followed by Klein with little Guld on his shoulders.

"Since when has the king's son forgotten how to walk?" asked Gurth gravely.

Little Guld was ashamed to have been seen carried on Klein's back, and he had no answer ready. He looked at the great-aunt, but she said nothing, though her eyes were blacker and brighter than ever.

"Come then," said Gurth putting out his hand to little Guld, "it is time to go home."

The beginning of a sob forced itself into little Guld's throat, but he crowded it back. Oh! that dear home, that pleasant light, that kind, loving foster-mother! He wished he had known beforehand that Gurth would come for him. He saw now that he might have known it. But he could not go, for he had promised to stay! If he went, the kobolds would think he had agreed to stay through fear and they were his people and must never think him afraid. He was more afraid of Gurth just then than of the kobolds, when he answered him with downcast eyes,

"I cannot go to-night, Gurth; I have promised to stay here for a few days."

Gurth groaned, and the great-aunt's eyes sparkled. He turned towards her, looking taller than ever before.

"Take care, woman!" he said; "you know your limits. Keep within them. Cast no snares around this innocent one! If he were older, he might well come among you, but he is too young, too young! You follow the words but not the meaning of your king's behest."

"Let Guld decide between us!" she said.

"Just a few days, dear Gurth," said little Guld, "because I promised them, and afterwards I will come home."

Now one of the last things the old king had said before he went away was that little Guld should be

allowed to go among his subjects when he chose, and even to remain if it pleased him, and this was well known by the kobolds.

"Good-night, then, little Guld," said Gurth sadly, and he went out alone on the dark road homeward. As he walked along he said to himself again and again.

"The king was unwise! The king was unwise!"

But what little Guld himself, sleepless on his strange bed, said in his own mind that night, unheard by anyone, was,

"I must never, never make a promise to anybody again until I am older and wiser!"

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER STONE BEAD

"I know it will not be to-day,
I know it will not be to-morrow."

— HELEN HUNT JACKSON.

The great-aunt was really, as she had said, a distant relative of the king on his father's side. Her own great-great-grandmother was a half-sister of the king's great-great-grandfather, and through all the generations there had been from time to time some discontented kobold who felt a jealousy for this side of the house and a desire to share in the ruling of the kingdom. The great-aunt's present plan was to gain an influence over little Guld, through his weakness, his ambition, his affection or his fear, she cared not which, so that as the time approached for his becoming the reigning king she could control through him all the finest positions and highest honors for her own favorite relatives, thus bringing a new tone and character into the government and setting those whom the king, his father, had most trusted, back into obscurity and oblivion.

She had lived so long and so exclusively with her own clan in the darker part of the cave-country that

she had no sympathy with, and knew little of, the diligent, self-respecting wood-cutters and laborers. That class she wished to see subjugated entirely. The rebels, among whom she counted the miners who lived in the lowest and darkest regions, she wished to see reduced to order and made faithful adherents of her own clan. Little Guld would be as good a king as anyone, provided he moved in the lines she planned,—better than any other perhaps, because he would have a hold upon the loyalty of the wood-cutters and others in the lighter localities. Apart from her policy she cared nothing for him.

Little Guld did not know why she showed him maps of his country and pointed out to him roads of which he knew nothing and told him of broad, unused fields where troops might be trained.

"I know where there is a cave in which stone weapons are concealed," she said to him, watching him with her keen eyes.

"Was my father a soldier?" asked little Guld.

"No, he was a judge, not a warrior," she replied, "but you are like my side of the house, and when you come to your own, Klein will be ready to command your forces and Heft to be your prime minister."

"I like Klein," said little Guld, but he made no promises.

"The great-aunt must be very wise indeed," he thought, after this talk; "I must learn to be as wise as she before I am a king."

Time wore away slowly for little Guld in the great-

aunt's house. The younger kobolds were noisy and quarrelsome, and the fire always smoked. Guld found it hard to keep his hands clean, and soot settled on his clothes. He no longer wondered that Klein's face was often grimy and that Mog and Heft and Hob and the others had such dark skins.

"What makes the wood on the fire smoke so?" he asked the housekeeper, the second day of his visit.

"We burn the roots that are cut near by," she answered; "the dirt clings to them and they always smoke."

"They make the kettle boil and they cook the dinner," said the great-aunt.

"My foster-mother's fire never smokes like that," said little Guld.

"No!" said the great-aunt sharply. "Old man Bonn attends to that matter! She must have the choicest of everything, she!"

"They have better chimneys over that way, I've heard —" began the housekeeper.

"You mustn't believe all you hear nor tell all you know, Goody Flipper!" interrupted the great-aunt.

"That sounds wise," thought little Guld; "I must remember that!"

He was sitting in his chair by the table, and to amuse himself drew from one of his pockets the round brown stone that Peer had given him, together with his blue stone bead and the few dried rose-leaves. Klein came to the table and they rolled the stone back and forth between them.

"Let me take your black stone, Heft," said Klein, turning around.

"I won't!" said Heft.

The great-aunt was watching them. She took up the stone bead and looked at it curiously.

"That was made in my great-grandmother's time," she said, "I myself have one like it somewhere."

After a little search here and there, she found her own blue stone bead and gave it to Guld.

"Take it for a keepsake," she said, "and put them both away. They came from some old necklace and there used to be a story about it, but it is all forgotten now."

"I like stories," said little Guld, as he looked at the two beads lying in his hand for a moment, before dropping them in his pocket. They were of the same size and the same color, but differently carved.

"What are those brown wispy things on the table?" asked Klein.

"Rose-leaves," replied little Guld. "They are not pretty any more."

"Rose-leaves!" cried the great-aunt excitedly, "oh! the plotting hill-woman that she is! When did she take you among roses? That was no place for the king's son!"

"She did not take me; I never went," said little Guld, "but she brought a rose and gave it to me."

"What did you do with it?" demanded the great-aunt.

"Pulled it to pieces," answered Guld.

"Clever little Guld!" said the great-aunt with one of her odd smiles, and gathering up the dry leaves she threw them into the fire.

Guld would have liked to explore the neighborhood and to find some of the roads that were set down on the great-aunt's maps. There were some caves near by that he would have liked to visit, but her eye was on him, and she would permit him to go nowhere unless carried by Klein. This was for a double reason; she was afraid he might attempt to escape if left to himself, and she also had an idea of impressing him with his own importance and making him feel that he should be waited upon and served.

"He whom he learns to depend upon will be his master," was her theory.

Little Guld disliked this very much, but he submitted, saying to himself,

"It is only for three days!"

Once while he was looking at a map and tracing out places with his finger, he stopped at the road near the stream, which Klein had been forbidden to travel, and asked the great-aunt where it led.

"To the serpents' dens," she said, "and to the cave of the bats."

Guld glanced up at her quickly; he wondered if she knew about Rod, but her face showed no sign.

"When you are king," she added, "you can imprison your enemies there."

"What is this road," asked Guld, pointing to the map, "that looks so jagged and turns off sharp beyond Klein's play-house?"

"That," she replied, "is a steep path down to the mines, but it is roundabout and full of dangers. The miners do not use it any more for fear the rocks will fall on them. There is not a kobold but knows better than to go down it. It must be all choked up by this time."

"What road do the miners take now?" asked Guld.

The great-aunt liked to show how much she knew about the kingdom, so she answered his questions as she would not have done had she not chosen.

"Many of them are mere stupid workmen and never come up at all," she said, "but the masters come when they like, though that is not often. Their road enters into that other road leading to the serpents' dens, and they have a closed gateway so no one can go down against their will. It is as if they had another country down there; no one knows what they are doing. But I will teach you to manage them when you become king!"

Now the great-aunt was very wise, but still she did not know everything.

CHAPTER XIII

A CAPLESS KING

"Less trouble is there among spears
Than with hard words about your ears."

— WILLIAM MORRIS.

"Now," said little Guld to himself joyously, "I have finished my three days and I am going home!"

He ate his breakfast at the disorderly table with a smile, though Heft seized a chance to pinch him and Mog kicked his feet. Klein looked expectant and the housekeeper wore her kindest manner.

"Now," said little Guld, "I am going home. Good-bye!"

He went around saying good-bye to each one, except Klein, whom he meant to take with him if he could. He said good-bye to the housekeeper, and then he went to the great-aunt and looked up in her bright alert eyes.

"I'm going. Good-bye, great-aunt!" he said.

"Oh! no, little Guld!" she replied, making her voice gentle, but at the same time taking off his cap and holding it above her. "I cannot let you go! You are our king and we claim you. We will all be your faithful servants, but here you must stay. Here you must stay!"

Now there is this thing about cave-folk and kobolds. If one of them loses his cap he feels that he has lost his personal power and must obey whatever is told him by the one who holds his treasure. It is often a very inconvenient and annoying thing, but that is the way they are brought up and the way they do.

Guld stood speechless. He felt it as an indignity and yet he was without power to act. A great fear arose up within him. Must he spend his life here in this smoke-stained cavern with these gibing, unruly, unmannerly kobolds, and never see Peer or Mata or Sada again, or his own dear foster-mother? What sort of a king could he ever be, or how could he care for his people? Such a cloud of grief came into his eyes that the housekeeper had to turn away so as not to look at him, and Klein almost cried from sympathy, but the great-aunt did not mind at all, and the kobold children laughed and mocked at their discomfited visitor.

"Can't go this time! Can't go this time!" they called out over and over as they danced around little Guld.

The great-aunt hushed them, and said,

"Now just make the best of it, Guld! You will soon feel at home with us, and when you are king you will see that this was well done."

Little Guld drew a long breath and then sat down. He did not see just what to do. The great-aunt took

her place by the fire and composedly began a new piece of knitting, making her needles fly and click.

Dinner passed, supper passed, and then there was nothing for Guld to do but to lie down on the bed he had not expected ever to touch again. He felt humiliated; the old happy days became as a dream and the great-aunt was the only reality.

The great-aunt sat up long after everyone else was asleep, making schemes and smiling over her own shrewdness.

The next day came and Guld sat by the table hour after hour silent and dejected. The younger kobolds were unusually noisy and mischievous and ran in front of the housekeeper, making her spill the kettle of water she was carrying to the fire.

"There!" she exclaimed crossly, boxing every ear she could reach, "see what work you have made on the floor, and there is no water left in the house for my cooking. There is not any even in the big crock."

"No," said the great-aunt hastily, "the crock is cracked and you must not put water in it any more. Go fill the kettle, Heft."

But the housekeeper said, "No, Heft is too clumsy, let Klein go."

So Klein took the kettle and started off to the water-cave. Guld hardly noticed all these things as they took place, but the great-aunt, whose thoughts were very busy, whispered something to Hob and Heft which made them scuffle out of the room and take

their places one on each side of the rock gateway, concealed in their black shadows. There they lay in wait to catch Guld if he should try to start homeward.

After a few moments the great-aunt said gently to little Guld,

"Go after Klein if you like, and when he has brought the water you and he can play together in his playhouse."

For this cunning old cave-woman, while she meant to hold strict authority over Guld, still wished him to feel affection for her, if possible, so that she might more easily influence him. Therefore she spoke gently and appeared to allow some liberty.

CHAPTER XIV

UNCLE GROAT

"He was cast down and heavy of heart, not looking for aught else to betide than had betid those last four days. But otherwise it fell out."

— WILLIAM MORRIS.

Little Guld went listlessly. He did not even glance at the road which led home, for that would have added to his heartache. He turned toward the playhouse and sat down on the step at its entrance. Klein was a long while coming, for he had to go several times for water, and little Guld, as he waited, began to listen to an odd sound in the distance.

It was like a feeble stepping with the thump, thump of a staff, and then there was the sound of something falling, followed by a groan. Then came a pause and then something fell again.

"I wonder if that was a rock in the miners' path," thought Guld, and springing up, he ran in the direction of the sound.

But before he reached the opening of the miners' path, he saw a little way up, in the abandoned road leading to the right, an old cave-man, very decrepit, leaning on a staff and ruefully rubbing his knee. On his back was a fagot of roots and another lay scat-

tered at his feet. The road was uphill and very stony, a hard climb for weary feet.

"I'm coming to help you!" called out little Guld, pushing up the hill as fast as he could.

"You needn't! I don't want you!" piped the old cave-man querulously, drawing his shaggy grey eyebrows into a frown. He was the oldest man Guld had ever seen, and he wore a round low hat something like Uncle Bonn's.

But little Guld, picking up the sticks which had rolled away, brought them on his arm, and putting them with the rest, tied up the fagot neatly, hoisted it upon his own shoulders and said:

"I'll go along with you and help you."

"None of your pranks now!" said the poor old cave-man, who was used to being derided and mocked by whatever little kobolds he met in his search for broken roots. But Guld looked up at him so pleasantly that he made no further objection to his plodding along at his side.

"Steep hill, isn't it?" said Guld, as they both stopped to take breath. "Do you live away up here?"

"Yes," replied the old cave-man shortly.

It was certainly a very stony road, with no sign of habitation whatever, no bushes, no living thing, except that once a hare scampered across the path, and it was almost, though not quite, as dark as the great-aunt's neighborhood.

On they went, slowly, because of the weight of the

fagots, and at last reached a broad, flat stone where the cave-man laid his fagot down and bade Guld do the same.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"Pretty tired," little Guld admitted. "I never carried anything heavy very far before, and I never went up such a hill. But I like to do it."

The old cave-man looked at him more keenly than before, and for the first time noticed that he wore no cap.

"Where do you live?" he demanded.

"At the great-aunt's," replied Guld.

"Oh! one of her foundling brood!" said the old kobold, and he felt increasing kindness toward the little fellow, who no doubt was meeting harsh treatment at her hands.

There was a stream bubbling out from under an overhanging rock near by, and Guld refreshed himself by drinking some of the cold water and bathing his face.

"Where do you live?" he then asked, looking up at the old cave-man.

"Right here," he answered.

No sign of a house was to be seen, but he led little Guld around behind an immense boulder and then through a crevice in the rocks just wide enough to make a natural door. This brought them into a cave which made a very good room. There were coals on the hearth still glowing, and the air was dry and warm. There were seats and a table and two beds.

There was light from the coals and from a lantern placed in the rocks.

The old cave-man put a fresh knot on the fire and it blazed up. He stooped to warm his wrinkled hands and little Guld saw more plainly than before how white and long his beard was, and how brown and shriveled his face looked. There was nothing terrifying about him, but he seemed feeble and lonely.

Little Guld felt as if he were in a dream, this place seemed so far away and so different from the great-aunt's, and so very far away from the foster-mother's dear home. The old life seemed like a thing wholly done with, and he did not feel like a king any more but only a little homeless kobold who had lost his cap.

"Who sleeps in the other bed?" he asked.

"That is for my son when he comes," said the old man; "now and then he leaves the mines and comes up to visit me. Come, you shall eat dinner with me and then, if you like to stay all night, you may sleep in the other bed. What do you say?"

"I should like it very much," said little Guld.

He was in no haste to go back to the great-aunt's smoky house, among the teasing kobolds, and she had not bidden him when to return. Besides, he reasoned, if it was right for him to visit among his people, it was right to stay over night with this poor old kobold if he chose.

So the aged cave-man brought out food, spread it upon the table, and they ate together.

CHAPTER XV

UNCLE GROAT'S SERVANT

"I draw water from the well,
I bind wood that the men fell."

— WILLIAM MORRIS.

After dinner, little Guld wanted to do something to help his new friend, and he said,

"I will bring you some more wood. Can I gather it anywhere besides down the hill?"

"Oh! yes," replied the cave-man; "there are some fields where there are plenty of loose roots a little farther on. Don't go towards the right,—there is a steep ledge there,—but keep to the left. It is a dark region and you may take the lantern. If any kobolds meet you, tell them Uncle Groat sent you to gather a fagot for him and they will not trouble you."

So little Guld started forth, lantern in hand, to explore new grounds in his kingdom. He was more ready to do this than to go back to the great-aunt's. He soon found himself in the dark region, stumbling now and then over twisting roots as he walked. He took up some loose pieces and began to bind them in a fagot.

"Who are you and what are you doing?" squeaked a sharp little voice at his elbow.

Guld looked and saw a small, ugly kobold with clenched fists.

"Uncle Groat sent me to gather fagots," he replied.
Then another voice farther off called out,
"Stop your noise, Blick!"

Guld now saw to his surprise that there was a hut not a rod away, with somebody standing in the door. He was rather glad of this, and when he had made his fagot he went forward and asked for a cup of water. A dreary laugh answered him from inside, but the kobold woman in the door turned and filled a cup from a jet of water near by.

"This is the only kind of water we have," she said; "it has a bad taste, but we can't help that."

"Oh! for a drink of good water!" murmured the dreary voice inside.

Little Guld drank a few swallows and threw the rest away. It was really a kind of mineral spring that these kobolds had, but the taste was so unpleasant that they used as little of the water as they could. If it had been on the outside of the earth instead of in the cave-country, someone would have built a great hotel near it and drawn crowds of people there, and it might have cured them of rheumatism, but still it would never have tasted one hundredth part as well as good, pure, cold water, crystal clear.

"Uncle Groat has good water, and if you will let me take a pipkin, I will bring you some," said Guld.

"Oh! do, do!" entreated the unhappy voice inside.
"Give him the big bucket."

So the big bucket was handed out to him, and well burdened by fagot, lantern and bucket, Guld picked his way back to Uncle Groat's.

"You're a clever little fellow," said the old caveman when he heard the story. "They would like to have you wait on them the same way every day, but it is my opinion and always has been that they could get good water right at home if they were smart enough to set about it."

"How?" asked Guld eagerly.

"With a pickaxe," said Uncle Groat. "They could listen and hear water running somewhere and break up the rock and let it out."

"I'll tell them," said Guld, and lifting the bucket of good water, he journeyed back to the dark fields and the little hut which he now saw was one of a cluster of poorly built dwellings. The kobold woman took the bucket from him and filled a cup for the lame kobold within, who drank with loud, eager swallows and called for more. Guld tried to explain to the kobolds what Uncle Groat had said, but they shook their heads and paid no attention to what they could not understand. He then thought he would try to do something by himself, and seeking a rocky wall near by which reached up to the roof overhead, he pressed his ear against it, listening as he moved along step by step. At last he heard a sound, a little trickling sound, and his lantern showed a spot of moisture shining on the surface somewhat higher than his head. He ran back to the hut and demanded a pickaxe.

"There's an old one that Kirt left, in the corner," said the lame kobold.

Guld, seizing this, carried it back with him, raised it and struck two or three blows against the rock. Then he rested, and after a minute struck again. A shower of small stones rattled down so that he had to step aside, but when he returned he found to his great joy that he had made a crack in the rock through which water was running in a stream large enough to fill readily a bucket or pipkin. "Come, come!" he shouted, after he had tasted of it, "it is beautiful clear cold water!"

"Oh! Luck, luck!" cried the kobolds as they came running out of all the huts, bringing bowls and cups, and Guld heard them asking one another,

"Who is this wise little kobold? He doesn't belong to any of us!"

"Oh! no," said the first kobold woman, "it is only Uncle Groat's servant. He came to get fagots."

"It's Uncle Groat's servant!" repeated one to another.

Little Guld did not mind this. It would be a long while before he became a king, and meantime he was very glad to gather wood for Uncle Groat, and very, very glad that he had found water for these poor, thirsty kobolds.

"How plainly I can see their faces," he thought. "My eyes must have grown very much used to the darkness."

But they were all looking about now in a wonder-

ing way, first at one another and then upward where, after the shower of loose stones, a faint light had made itself visible. They did not know why, and Guld himself hardly knew why, except that somehow his blows with the pickaxe had brought it. It made the space where they stood as light as the road near Gurth's house, like dim twilight instead of utter darkness.

"Uncle Groat's servant has done this too!" whispered the kobolds one to another, when they found they could see without lanterns.

"Now you have light and you have water!" said Guld joyously, "so I will gather up another fagot for Uncle Groat and go home."

"Help him! Help him!" called out the lame kobold who had crept to the door of the hut.

With that, the youngest and strongest, about a dozen in all, went to work with a will, gathering up loose sticks and roots till each had made a fagot, and then they followed after little Guld, so that when Uncle Groat came out to look up the road he beheld a whole procession coming, Guld at the head, and every kobold of them had a fagot on his back. They piled them up by the rock, pulled their caps as they said good-bye, and then ran home laughing.

"Well done!" exclaimed Uncle Groat, when he heard Guld's story; "this is the biggest day's work you ever did, cap or no cap!"

Little Guld was now, you may be sure, both hungry and tired, so Uncle Groat first gave him a bowl of

porridge and when that was eaten told him to go to bed.

The bed was hard but very good, and Guld, with a happier heart than he had carried for many days, fell instantly into a sweet sleep and dreamed he was at home again hearing his foster-mother sing one of the songs he liked best, the one about castle halls and twelve blue beads that hung upon a single string.

CHAPTER XVI

THE UNWILLING DEPARTURE

“I do but beg a little changeling boy
To be my henchman.”

— SHAKESPEARE.

A little after the middle of the night Guld awakened. He heard the sound of voices before he opened his eyes, and lay still for awhile wondering where he was. When he raised his eyelids he saw two men sitting by the table talking. There was still a little fire burning, and by the flickering light he could make out that one was Uncle Groat and the other a much younger kobold with a keen, determined face.

“Are they the same, Brand?” asked Uncle Groat in a low voice.

“Yes, father,” replied the other.

“And you say they are at the door? Let them bring in the bags and go.”

Brand went to the door and gave a low call. Three kobolds in shabby leather entered immediately, bearing bags which appeared to be of great weight. These they laid upon the floor at Groat’s feet.

“Go back to the mines at once,” ordered Brand.
“I will follow presently.”

After their steps had died away in the distance he

moved a great flat stone in the corner, disclosing what might be called a cellar, and pushed the bags one after another into it. They fell heavily. Then he put the stone back into its place.

"Our treasury is filling up for time of need," he said; "we may see great changes yet."

"Yes," said Groat. "The time may come when this hoard will mean power for little King Guld."

"Not Guld!" said Brand impatiently. "Don't build too much on Guld, father. Down our way the men are bound to have a king of their own."

"Don't give it to them, Brand," said the old kobold. "Nothing but war and trouble will come of it. I loved the old king and I favor his son!"

"Well, I didn't know the old king," said Brand carelessly, "but we will see how things turn."

After this they sat silent awhile, and little Guld, who had listened with dreamy interest, fell fast asleep again.

Groat brought out food from his shelf in the rock and he and Brand ate and drank together.

"It is near morning," said Brand at last, "and not worth while to go to bed. I must get back when work begins."

As he spoke he glanced towards his bed for the first time since he had entered, and saw Guld's head on the pillow.

"Hey!" he exclaimed, starting up. "Who's that you've got in my bed?"

"Hush!" said Groat, "that is a poor little kobold

who has been bringing wood for me,—one of the great-aunt's runaways. She has taken his cap from him."

"What's the good of a kobold without a cap!" grumbled Brand.

"He's some good," said Groat. "Sometimes I think I will keep him for company. He's an innocent, kindly fellow. I like to see him around. I was climbing up the hill yesterday with fagots, and stumbled in a pitfall Hob had made for me, when this little wight ran out and helped me. I think I will keep him."

"Let him get his cap first," said Brand, "and then perhaps you can make something of him."

"Oh!" said little Guld starting up, "are you Uncle Groat's son? Do you want your bed?"

"No," replied Brand shortly, "but I want you to get up and eat breakfast and be off."

"I should like to keep him," said Uncle Groat; "I don't mind at all about his not having a cap."

"A kobold's no good without his cap," said Brand, but down in his heart he began to feel sorrow for the little fellow with wistful eyes, who now stood upon his feet ready to go.

"Eat your breakfast," he directed, and Guld ate what the old kobold set before him.

"I will take him along with me as far as the great-aunt's," said Brand to his father. "When he manages to get his cap back, he may come up here again and do chores for you if he likes."

"Good-bye, Uncle Groat," said little Guld. "I don't like to leave you, I wish I could stay longer, but maybe I can come again some day."

Brand now took him by the hand and they started forth on their way. The aged kobold stood outside his door and watched them go down the stony hill, little Guld trying to take as long steps as Brand did. As a turn in the steep descent hid them from sight, Groat went slowly into his house, cleared away his table, and carefully made up the bed where the little guest had slept, but he left the dent in the pillow.

"I hope he will come back," he said to himself; "he was company for me. I wish I had given him that curious old blue bead I have carried so long. Children like such things."

CHAPTER XVII

DOWN THE DANGEROUS ROAD

“Merrily ever the cavern rings
As merrily ever his pick he swings.”

— EUGENE FIELD.

Brand and little Guld kept on down the hill, and as they neared the foot, Guld said,

“Here is where Uncle Groat stumbled.”

Brand stopped, muttering angry words as he examined the spot and found a hole dug in the ground, which had been concealed with sticks and had made a pitfall for his father’s feeble steps.

“It is a mean gang,” he said, “but some are worse than others. The great-aunt has the odds and ends of many families in her charge. I wonder what one you belong to!”

“I belong to a good family,” said little Guld, and as he looked up with his honest eyes, and his boyish locks tumbled about his head, Brand felt more and more kindly towards him. When they came in sight of Klein’s playhouse, little Guld became very sober and his feet lagged. Brand let go his hand.

“Good-bye, little runaway!” he said. “I must get back to the mines now.”

“I should like to go with you,” said Guld. “I

want to see the mines very much indeed, and perhaps I shall not have a chance after I get my cap."

"That's truth," said Brand; "I dare say you have heavy hours before you. And what's one holiday more or less! Come, you shall go with me if you like; to-morrow will be time enough for your cap."

"Oh! I am so glad!" exclaimed little Guld, with perfect confidence in the stalwart young miner. "Shall we go down the steep path where the rocks hang over?"

"Yes," replied Brand, "and as the footing is insecure and the path very dark, I will carry you in my arms so as to travel quicker, for I know every step with my eyes shut."

So saying, he lifted up little Guld and strode off with him. Guld put his arms around Brand's neck and his head rested against Brand's cheek, as they plunged down into the darkness, passing rapidly from rock to rock and across bottomless fissures.

Brand's kindly feeling was now very strong toward this little friend who trusted him so completely, and whose breath was as even and untroubled as if they were on a level, well-lighted highway instead of a precipitous and perilous descent. Cheek pulsed against cheek, and each felt the warmth of the other's breath.

"Upon my word," thought Brand with real surprise, "I believe I'd give my life for this little fellow if he needed it."

After perhaps fifteen minutes of this dangerous

journey they found themselves in a large cave or room lighted by occasional lanterns. Here there was not much earth; it was almost all rock, and miners in leather aprons were at work with picks and hammers, splitting pieces of quartz from the walls and examining with great care every new spot or cavity that was laid bare. There were doorways leading into other rooms or vaults, in each of which kobolds were at work, and the noise of so many hammers made a sound like the loud ticking of a thousand clocks, incessant because it could not escape from among the walls, and by repetition and echo was prevented from dying away.

The kobolds scarcely glanced at Brand, who was one of the chief overseers, or at Guld, who was now walking at his side. Brand took Guld through several passages, all of which were bordered with recesses, some vacant, but most of them occupied by miners who were exploring the winding veins of the rock for gold.

"Does each one keep what he finds?" asked Guld.

"Oh, no!" said Brand smiling; "they get regular wages. That is the fairest way. They are paid in pieces that have been stamped. Now in this vault the miners have found very little yet, while in that at the left you can see specks of gold shining."

Brand next led Guld to an opening in the rock below and showed him rough, narrow steps winding around it in steep descent. It was like looking down into a well.

"Follow me," he said, as he started down.

Little Guld scrambled after him, clinging to jutting points, and setting his feet securely on each step.

"Well done! you are a born climber!" said Brand, awaiting him at the bottom.

They were now a great many feet lower than the mining vaults which they had left, and here the whole thing was repeated, passages, recesses and rooms pilastered with crystalline primitive rock. Here, too, were busy workmen wielding their hammers, and loosened blocks of quartz lay about, some of them showing traces of yellow deposit.

"What becomes of the gold?" asked Guld.

"A part is traded away on market-day," said Brand, "but much of the gold is stamped in pieces, and after our wages are paid the rest is sent to the royal treasury. What odds and ends are left the overseers manage the best way they can."

Guld remembered the heavy bags he had seen hidden under Uncle Groat's floor, but thought it better not to mention them.

There was no natural light down in these mines, nothing but that of lamps and lanterns and sometimes a torch. As they paced along an irregular path Guld asked,

"Is that running water that I hear?"

"Yes, there is quite a stream near by," replied Brand, thinking to himself that this was a very observant little kobold.

A few steps brought them to it, and Guld exclaimed

with wonder, for this was no bubbling spring or pool or little stream, but a mountain torrent descending in cascades from an unseen height above, spraying over the sharp rocks in its swift flow and hurling itself a few rods farther on into a forever unsounded abyss below. Brand waved his lantern so as to light up the foaming waters.

"No one ever told me about this," said little Guld as they turned away at last.

"There is very little gossip between the miners and the common people who live in the old part of the kingdom," said Brand. "We are really a world by ourselves. It is very seldom that a visitor comes here. We wonder sometimes that so little interest is taken in us except to receive our gold."

"Did a king ever come?" asked little Guld hesitatingly.

"Never!" replied Brand. That was what he thought, but perhaps the oldest miner could have told him a different story.

"I am glad I could come," said little Guld. "There are so many hundreds of miners here. Do they like it to live so deep down?"

"Some do and some don't," said Brand, "but come, I have something else to show you, something that not even the miners know about. It is my own discovery."

CHAPTER XVIII

ANOTHER STONE BEAD

"Where now in dark and now in light,
The countless columns, glimmering white,
Seemed leading out to the Infinite."

— E. B. BROWNING.

Brand now led little Guld by a narrow sidewise path away from the mines, to a chasm in the rocks where all was blackness.

"I lost my best hammer down here one day," he said, "and as I heard it strike bottom I climbed down after it. The place is too slippery for you. Stand exactly here while I go down, and jump when I tell you. I will catch you in my arms."

Little Guld obeyed and stood motionless while Brand disappeared in the black depth underneath.

"Now jump!" Brand ordered, and over went Guld at the word, straight into his strong arms ten feet below. Here they stood upon a broad shelf of rock, and Brand turned his lantern toward a large, irregular crevice into which he entered with Guld, traversing a narrow, ravine-like path which wound up and down and aslant, then through an opening lined with rounded, slippery rocks, not loose, but firmly imbedded together.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Brand, and taking a crooked bit of wood from his pocket, he lit it by the flame in his lantern and waved it aloft so that Guld could see.

A cavern, not broad but lofty, shone revealed, with pillars of snowy whiteness rising to the roof. The floor was white, and curious shapes rose up from it in fantastic beauty, such as might be built by frozen spray about a cataract in winter. From above hung great white icicles of varying lengths,—that is, they looked like icicles, but they were not made of ice. They were a beautiful formation, pure white spar crystals, radiating soft brilliance by the torch light.

"Sit down," said Brand, pointing to some circular white blocks shaped like seats and taking one himself.

Guld was silent for a few moments; he could hardly believe in the reality of this wonderful scene. Then he said,

"What very small creatures we are. We could not make this. Who did?"

"Oh! I don't know," said Brand; "you might as well ask who made the gold-mine."

"Perhaps we ought not to stay," said Guld, looking down at his stained clothes and grimy fingers; "we don't seem to belong here."

"You're right," said Brand, "and besides, I must get back to work. But I wanted you to see something for once in your life and you may never have another chance. The great-aunt doesn't believe in

holidays. Wait, I will give you something I found in a corner under one of those seats the first time I came here. Keep it to remember me by."

As he spoke, he handed little Guld a blue stone bead.

"Thank you, Brand," said little Guld, putting it into his pocket.

The two then made their way from the beautiful snow-white cavern through the difficult path back to the mines and the click, click of the hammers.

Here Brand went from vault to vault again, inspecting the excavations, and sometimes using a hammer himself. Guld followed him silently, wondering how soon anything would be said about his return to the great-aunt's. The miners were too busy to notice him much, but now and then one looked to see who the bright-eyed little kobold without a cap could be. Stein, a jolly, round-faced fellow, who was also an overseer, said to Brand with a laugh,

"Got a new apprentice, comrade?"

"Aye," said Brand, laughing too, and looking down kindly at Guld.

"I should like to take a hammer," said Guld, and for a joke they handed him one. Some big lumps of quartz had been thrown in a corner, and Stein said,

"Take your choice, youngster, and see what you find."

Guld could see yellow spots here and there on the lumps and he considered:

"If I take a big spot it may grow little, and if I take a little one it may grow big."

So he chose the lump that showed the smallest spot and struck it with all his might. As it flew apart a nugget of gold was revealed, and Stein exclaimed,

"You're a born miner, little master! Hold on to him, Brand, and we'll train him."

At this moment, a kobold came running in great haste and said to Brand,

"Kirt has come again, and he is talking treason."

"I'll clear him out," exclaimed Brand, and turning to Guld he said,

"You may stay around here till I come back."

Then off he went with all speed to the upper tier of mines. Stein gave a short laugh.

"We don't want Kirt's treason," he said, "we'll talk our own treason when we want any. Now, little master, amuse yourself as you like."

Guld, hammer in hand, looked about him.

"There are two boys over in that far corner," he said.

"Go, work with them, if you want to," replied Stein. "Here, Toby, and you, Stump, look out for little master here, take him home to dinner, and you may have a half holiday with him."

Guld joined the two little kobolds and began to knock off chips of rock at their side. Suddenly Toby stood on his head, then on one hand, then on the other hand, threw his hammer up, turned a somersault, and caught the hammer coming down.

"Can you do that?" he asked.

"No!" exclaimed Guld with great admiration.
"No, I wish I could!"

"Why does Stein call you little master, then?"
asked Toby. "What can you do?"

"I don't know," said Guld; "I think he said that
because I broke some gold out of a stone."

"Some folks are lucky folks!" muttered Stump,
who was a slow sort of kobold and never yet had
found gold.

"There!" shouted Toby, as all in an instant si-
lence settled on the mines and not a hammer was
heard, "it's dinner time and you've got us a half
holiday, little master, so now let us go home and make
the best of it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Guld joyfully, "I was wonder-
ing where you live and I want to see your houses very
much."

CHAPTER XIX

STONE TREASURE

"I went out with an older one
And just at first I thought it fun,
And learned a lot of tricks."

— LEWIS CARROLL.

They laid their three hammers down and started forth, Toby leading the way. They soon left the mining vaults and came to an open space stretching far in the distance, where there were more than a hundred little houses, some of them caves, but most of them built of refuse quartz. Lanterns were hung aloft with the regularity of our street lamps, making a rather pretty view of this underground village.

The miners were a hard-working, diligent people, leading for the most part orderly lives, though with not much rule or regulation except in working hours. They were not always agreed as to who should tend the lanterns or bring the water, and this was a frequent cause of dispute among them, but they were not ungovernable.

Then there was the milking of the cows. There must have been good pastures somewhere, for the herd went away every morning after being milked and re-

turned at eve, well fed and lowing. The climate was mild in this underground settlement and sometimes a gentle breeze was felt. Fires were seldom needed and the kobold women did much of their cooking over burning oil made from tallow fat. For this reason their houses were well smoked on the inside, but on the outside the clean quartz walls made a very creditable appearance.

Stump's mother gave Guld some dinner. It was a rabbit stew, and he ate it from a stone bowl with a spoon made of hard polished bone. Stump and he each had two helpings. Toby was waiting for them when they had finished, and more than twenty kobold boys were lurking about, curious to see the stranger who wore no cap.

"This is little master!" said Toby, turning toward the kobolds and winking with one eye as he spoke.

There was a long stretch of stony plain between the rows of dwellings, much wider than a road. From the gateway of the mines to the farther end where the last lantern hung it was about forty rods. Here on holidays the miners sometimes wrestled or slung stones at a mark. It was, of course, a famous playground for the children, and racing was their great pastime.

Toby called all the crowd to a point near the last lantern.

"We will run a race!" he said.

"Oh! don't!" begged poor, slow Stump.

"Three, two, one!" shouted Toby, "away!"

Off they went, Guld and all. Stump, finding himself the last, stopped short very soon, others stumbled and so gave it up. When the racers reached the mines six of them only had endured,—Guld, Toby and four more. Guld ran a little carefully because of the stones and did not put out his whole strength, but he was one of the six, as Toby saw to his surprise.

“Now, we six!” said Toby, ranging them in line again.

“Three, two, one! Away!”

Back they ran, but two fell out. Stump managed to get in the way, and Toby made a flying leap over him. Four reached the goal, Guld, Toby and two more.

“Now, we four!” said Toby, not allowing time for breath; but two said they were tired of running, so there were only Guld and Toby to start at the given word. They reached the mine wall almost side by side, but Guld’s hand touched it first and still he had not run as fast as he could. Toby glanced keenly at him and Guld smiled in return.

“Shake hands!” said Toby. They shook hands.

Toby now climbed up the wall, catching at every projection until he stood above the mine entrance, and reaching higher still hung his cap on a jag of granite. Then he came down as he had gone up.

As soon as he touched ground little Guld, who had gained great skill in climbing with Peer, ran up the wall like a squirrel, setting his hands and his feet in

sure places, and taking the cap from the jag carried it on and hung it eight feet higher.

"Toss it down!" said Toby. "I haven't time to climb any more."

Guld tossed it toward him, and lightly descended.

"Hooray! Hooray!" cried the other little kobolds, who by this time had gathered around.

"Shake hands!" said Toby. And again they shook hands.

"Now play stone-treasure!" clamored the other kobolds in great excitement.

Just then Stump's mother was heard calling from her stone hut.

"Stump! Have you gathered my mushrooms?"

"No," said Stump; "I forgot it. I'll go now!"

"May I go too?" asked little Guld, for he wanted to see all he could while down in the miners' settlement.

"Yes, little master," said Stump. "I'll get two bowls."

"All right," said Toby, "and while you are gone, the rest of us will set the stones for the game."

Guld and Stump, each carrying a coarse earthen bowl, now crossed the broad grounds and went into the darkness beyond the houses. By the light of Stump's lantern they found the mushrooms growing and pulled them up one by one.

"You may pick the little button-ball ones," said Stump, "and I'll pick the odd sizes. My mother likes the button-balls best."

So Guld gathered all the little round ones, about of a size, and filled his bowl.

By the time they returned to the main ground the little kobolds had set a long row of stones from one end to the other, planting them down in the most natural manner as if they had been there forever. The stones were of good size and very much alike. As Guld drew near, Toby called him, and raising one of the midway stones, showed him a bright, round piece of gold with a letter cut in the middle. "Do you want it?" he asked.

"Yes, I should like it," said Guld.

"Well, then," said Toby, dropping the stone back upon the coin, "you may have it if you can get it, but you must not touch the stone with your hands. You must run to the mines and get my pick-hammer and run back and pry up the stone."

"You may mark the stone!" said the eager kobolds winking at each other.

"Yes," said Toby, "you may mark the stone."

That seemed reasonable as the stones were all so very much alike, so Guld took one of the button-ball mushrooms and laid it on the stone which covered the gold piece. Then off he ran to get the pick-hammer.

Now it so happened that since that day, long, long ago, when Peer told Guld to count the boulders as he ran, he had made a habit of noticing each thing he passed, and counting also, until he did it without any effort, and a very good habit it was as he found when



he ran back with the pick, for on every stone in the row now lay a button-ball mushroom.

"Oh! that's how they play!" thought Guld, a little surprised, but he did not stop running till he had passed thirty-three stones. Then he stopped at the thirty-fourth stone, put the pick under and pried it up, and took out the gold piece.

"Hooray! Hooray!" shouted the kobolds again and again, as if they had gone wild.

"You are the first that ever did it, little master!" said Toby very respectfully.

Many of the women had come out to see the game and nodded their pleasure at the result, but as soon as Guld got the coin Stump was made by his mother to trudge from end to end of the line of stones gathering her scattered button-balls, which it would have been a shame to waste.

"What is this mark on the gold?" asked Guld, looking intently at the piece in his hand.

"That letter stands for 'Guld,'" replied Toby, "for 'little King Guld.'"

Guld started on hearing his own name spoken in this strange region, but Toby continued without noticing,

"We will have our own king, some day, and then we will change the mark."

Guld did not feel wise enough to reply to this, so said nothing.

CHAPTER. XX

LITTLE MASTER

"But moile not too much underground for the Hope of Mines is very uncertaine."

— BACON.

By this time the miners were coming home from work, and Brand appeared first of all, anxious to find his little friend again. He had been delayed longer than he expected.

His stone hut was a small one, near the mines, and there he lived alone. Before entering it he took Guld to a water cave close by and they washed their hands and faces. Guld dipped his head, which was a favorite habit of his, and as it dried his hair went up in the beginnings of curls. It was not long enough to make more than a beginning.

"Upon my word, you are quite a decent chap, little master!" said Brand approvingly, and Guld felt cheered.

When they got back to the stone hut they found a clamor among the miners, for somebody must bring water, somebody must milk cows, and somebody must tend lanterns, yet no one wanted to be servant to the rest. This kind of dispute was not infrequent among

them and it sometimes ended in the weakest being driven to the work by the strongest, but this time they appealed to Brand.

"It's enough to manage you in the mines without having to watch you here too," he said impatiently.

"I won't work!" "I won't!" "I won't!" cried one and another. Meanwhile the cows were lowing, the lanterns were growing dim, and the women were starting out to fill the big stone water-pots themselves.

"What shall I say to them, little master?" asked Brand, not really expecting an answer, but willing to gain time.

Guld did some quick thinking and spoke up clearly, "Choose five to fill the lamps, five to bring water and five to milk," he said, "begin with the best men, so it will be an honor, and in ten days choose three other fives, and go on till every one has taken his turn. That is fair."

"Yes, that's fair! That's fair!" cried the kobolds, and now the strongest of them were glad to be chosen first, since there was honor in it. Brand named them rapidly and they ran off to their work.

"You are a born ruler, little master!" said Brand when they were alone in his hut, and for some time he looked very thoughtful.

Guld found much to interest him in Brand's hut, for it had shelves with curious things on them. There were pieces of milky spar and a great boar's tusk carved with odd figures. There was a little bowl of

a bluish gray color, filled with round polished pebbles, and there was an old copper chisel which Brand valued more than all.

"Did you buy it on market-day?" asked Guld. Brand shook his head.

"We do trade for metal-hammers and chisels sometimes with the hill-men," he said, "but this is different work. It puzzles me. I found it in a little, low, winding cave that I broke into while mining. It is very old; we have nothing like it."

That night Guld slept in Brand's bed, and awoke in the morning wondering what next was to befall him. He was pretty sure he would have to go back to the great-aunt's that day, and while he dreaded it, yet he hoped he might, when there, find some way to regain his cap.

Brand looked sober when he started for the mines, taking little Guld with him, and some of the kobolds in the stone huts called out,

"Good-bye, little master! Come again!"

"Good-bye," said little Guld. "Some day I will come again."

As he walked along with his hand in Brand's hand, he said,

"It is very wonderful down here, but I wish the miners could live higher up where it is lighter."

"What is, is!" said Brand, and then he added abruptly, "I think you must be of good family, little master."

"I am," replied Guld.

They passed through the mines, both lower and upper, Brand giving some directions as he went.

"Good-bye," shouted Stein after them; "come back when you get your cap, little master!"

On reaching the point where the steep ascent of the dangerous path began, Brand took Guld in his arms again and held him close while he made his way up through the blackness and over the uneven rocks and fissures. When they had almost reached the top, they heard the sound of some one whistling not far away.

"That's Klein," said little Guld. "I know the way now, so you need not go any farther, dear Brand."

"Perhaps that is better," said Brand, putting him on the ground, "but when you get your cap, little master, you will be right welcome again in the miners' kingdom. Remember that. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, dear Brand," said Guld affectionately, and then he ran lightly up the rocks to find Klein. He found him in his play-house. Klein stared and stopped whistling.

"I thought you had gone home," he said. "The great-aunt sent me out to find you and I couldn't. I slept here all night and Mog brought me some breakfast. She said I must not come back without you, but I didn't mind, if you were only safe home again."

"I have been exploring paths," said little Guld, "but none of them led home."

And that was all he told to Klein, or to the great-

aunt herself, when he went back into her smoky, noisy house, for he remembered what he once heard her say,

“ You must not tell all you know, Goody Flipper! ”

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE EARTHEN CROCK

"I hold that the true age of wisdom is when
We are boys and girls, and not women and men,
When as credulous children we know things because
We believe them — however averse to the laws."

— JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

The great-aunt did not ask him many questions, all she cared for was to have him back in her possession, but she had passed sleepless nights and was nervous and irritable. The next day, while Guld was sitting by himself thinking earnestly how he could manage to get his cap, Hob and Heft fell to quarreling and the noise and contention became so disturbing that the great-aunt, seeming unable to bear it, arose suddenly, knitting in hand, and left the house.

"There now, see what you have done!" exclaimed the housekeeper.

"Do you suppose she has gone up to that place?" whispered Mog fearfully. The housekeeper nodded. Just then Klein came in with a kettle of water.

"She's gone!" he said excitedly. "I saw her open the door and go through. She took her knitting."

Guld found himself wondering what they meant, but he asked no questions. The housekeeper looked troubled.

"She has not been there for so long, I thought she would never go again," she said.

"Did something frighten her the last time she went?" asked Klein.

"I believe something did," the housekeeper replied. "And she is not now what she used to be; she cannot stand so much. She ought not to leave home."

"It is a long, long way up there," said Klein. "I looked once and there was no end."

"Oh! yes, there was an end. There is an end to everything," said the housekeeper.

The children now kept on at their noisy tricks without interruption. Klein looked wistfully at little Guld and sat down near him.

"Where has she gone?" asked Guld.

"Upstairs," replied Klein.

Then Guld asked,

"Did she take my cap with her?"

"I suppose she did," said Klein, looking all around; "I don't see it anywhere."

They then sat silent, for neither of them wished to join in the turbulent play of Mog and Heft and the other kobolds. Suddenly the housekeeper uttered an exclamation.

"Hush!" she said. "She's coming!"

And as abruptly as she had departed, the great-aunt now re-appeared, trembling in every limb, and made her way to her old seat by the fire. She undertook to knit, but could hardly make out her stitches.

"Why, you have lost a needle!" cried Mog.

Then the great-aunt trembled more violently than before and said in an imploring tone,

“Will you go for my needle, little Klein?”

“Yes, I’ll go,” he said, and would have started without a lantern if the housekeeper had not put one in his hand.

“Be quick and be careful,” said the great-aunt as Klein went out.

“Is there danger?” asked the housekeeper.

“When can anyone say that there is no danger?” murmured the great-aunt, as if talking to herself.

Little Guld watched with some interest for Klein’s return, and the younger kobolds came crowding around the housekeeper as if a panic had spread among them.

“Listen!” said the housekeeper, after some moments. “That is Klein’s step!”

“There are other steps!” exclaimed the great-aunt. “Get out of sight, children!”

The kobolds ran hither and thither, hiding in the darkest corners, but little Guld sat listening, for mingled with Klein’s voice he heard other voices, clear, young voices, and he wondered who was coming. Suddenly the great-aunt stepped forward, lifted him unceremoniously, carried him to the large stone crock by the chimney and thrust him into it.

“Keep your head down!” she whispered. Then she drew her chair before the crock and began knitting.

Klein now entered, followed by two children, who

had very happy, expectant faces. They were not at all like the kobolds. It was as if fresh air and sunlight had come in, so radiant were the little girls who had ventured down the long, long stairway from their home on the upper hillsides far above the kobold kingdom. But their visit was unwelcome.

"I couldn't help it!" said Klein, when he met the great-aunt's frown.

"They must go home!" she said sternly.

"Oh! we have an errand," exclaimed one of the children, "we have found your needle!"

She held it up, but when the great-aunt would have taken it, she lifted it above her reach and an intent, pleased look came into her eyes.

"Give it to me, and go!" said the great-aunt.

The hill-child gave a smiling glance of intelligence at her companion, and then asked most unexpectedly,

"Who is under that table?"

"Klein's brother," replied the great-aunt. "Come out here, Heft."

So out came Heft.

"Who is behind the big chair?" asked the hill-child again.

"Klein's sister," replied the great-aunt. "Come here, Mog."

Then out came sulky Mog, while little Guld, down in the crock, wondered at the great-aunt's forbearance. But that was not the only thing he had to think about, for his foot meeting something in the bottom of the crock, he put his hand to it and found

— his cap! This he placed quickly upon his head, just as the visitor exclaimed,

“Who is in that earthen crock behind you!”

“It is little Guld,” said the great-aunt in a low voice, and turning about, she bent over the crock and lifted the boy-king out upon the floor.

“Oh! you are kobolds!” the hill-child cried, with sparkling eyes, “and I suppose there are dozens more of you in those dark corners.”

The housekeeper looked alarmed, and the great-aunt’s voice trembled as she asked again for her needle.

“Not yet,” said the child. “We want to see all this country first. When you have taken us over it, then you may have your needle.”

“How wise they are!” thought little Guld and he wondered more and more from what far bright region they had come, of which he had never heard.

But the great-aunt and the housekeeper declared that they could not go guiding strangers about. Neither would Heft or Mog consent. But Klein said,

“I would, if I knew the way.”

“Take me and I will show you!” exclaimed Guld, and the next moment he was aloft on Klein’s shoulder, going out upon the road, with the hill-children following.

“Turn neither to right nor left,” said Guld, “but go straight to the stream in the rocks where you met me that day.”

Klein nodded. The visitors were interested at

every step. They asked questions about the walls and fields and the great spreading roots that looked like trees upside down.

"I suppose we are in a great winding cave," said one. "Did your folks dig it out?"

"They found narrow roads first and then made them wider," said little Guld, who had heard this from Peer.

"I always wanted to visit an underground kingdom and now I am really in one," said the hill-child. "See, there is a brook. Let us sit down and rest. I love to look up at that arching brown roof."

CHAPTER XXII

THE FOURTH STONE BEAD

"Long winding caverns glittering far
Into a crystal distance."

— E. B. BROWNING.

Little Guld, who, you may be sure, did not remain on Klein's shoulders any longer than the moment it took them to pass the gate-way of the great-aunt's premises, now felt his heart beat fast for joy when they reached the brook that was like a boundary to him, to cross which was to enter upon his old happy life again. Oh! how long a time it seemed since that day when he had so thoughtlessly wandered off after Klein with his water-pipkin.

But when the children were rested and they all moved on again, and when they made the turn which brought them into the better road, with the foster-mother's home in full sight, Guld became very silent. So much had happened since he left that dear home, since he went out at that door, and down those well-known steps! Perhaps his foster-mother had suffered, perhaps she would not forgive him! He glanced furtively at the door through which the soft light stole out as of old, and he tried to hasten by

it. But there was the sound of singing and the hill-children stopped to listen. They liked the way the song ran :

“The kobolds may cling to their rock-bound walls
And seek the gloom of their mountain halls,
But when twelve blue beads hang on one strand
A queen shall come laughing to kobold-land.”

Then they made up their minds to go in and little Guld did not hinder them, but himself stayed outside. He could hear their voices and he wondered what they were saying. It was all like a dream to him. When, after a little while, they called him in, it was still like a dream. There stood his foster-mother with arms outstretched, and he ran to her. He was at home again! She looked down pityingly on his pale face with a strange, old look upon it, his tangled hair, his smoke-stained jacket, but she smiled all the while for joy that he was at home again.

Presently he roused himself, for there were the children waiting, and he had promised to show them the country.

“Take them to the grand hall,” said Rhea when he told her this, for she was pleased with the hill-children who were so happy and fearless.

Little Guld led his company up the road, making the turn towards the workshops but not stopping there long, for he was eager to reach the grand hall. Into the narrow passage he went, followed by Klein and the visitors, and a few moments more brought

them into the vast crystal cavern, sparkling with light on every side.

"How beautiful!" they all cried, but Klein held his hands before his eyes for a little while, he was so dazzled.

Guld was delighted; he began to feel like a king again, and laughed for pleasure when the hill-children wanted to run a race. He knew what running was, the ecstasy of the swift flying motion, scarcely touching the ground. He won every race, and when the hill-girl mischievously threw the knitting needle as far as she could on one side as she ran, little Guld sprang after it, and dashed back with it in his hand, winning the race as before.

Suddenly, as they stood over at one side of the cavern they were startled by the sound of voices above them which seemed to be only a little way off, perhaps among the rocks.

"Hark!" said Klein, and they all listened.

Then Guld, seeing how to climb up the cavern's side by the projecting stones, led the way, and the children and Klein clambered after him, till they reached a kind of platform where they could hear the voices very distinctly, not more than four feet away. Little Guld gazed earnestly at the rocky wall which at that point appeared to be hewn and fashioned like a gateway.

"It is the grandfather's gate," he said to himself, "Here is where he went out! And it has never been opened since."

"Oh!" exclaimed one of the hill-children, "can't we

go out here, little Guld? Those are our playmates outside. Do let us go out here!"

"It will be so much quicker than going up all those stairs," urged the other. "Do let us go out here, little Guld!"

Guld hesitated. He wanted to keep them longer, he would have liked to keep them always, but he remembered how he had been detained in the great-aunt's dwelling, and he would not bring sorrow on his eager little guests.

"You may go if I can open the gate," he said; "come, Klein, and help me move it. It has not been stirred in a hundred years!"

The two boys pushed with all their strength and the granite gate began to move. There was a rush of cool fragrant air, a burst of daylight, and a view of glimmering green foliage clothing the trees outside. Out pressed the hill-children, greeted by the voices of their own familiar hill-people, and, as they left the opening, little Guld and Klein closed the gate quickly and the wonderful visit was over.

Little Guld drew a long breath, his hand still resting on the heavy granite gate. He felt as if he had had a peep into another world, and so he had. He did not even know what sunlight and green leaves were when he saw them, his eyes were dazzled by the sudden brightness, but in his heart he resolved that some day he would open that gate again.

He then turned with Klein to leave the cavern hall, and as they went, he said,

"I did not know before that there could be any place lighter than this."

"There isn't in our kingdom," said Klein, "and we belong here."

"How do we know but that our kingdom reaches outside as well as inside?" was Guld's reply to this. "I wish I knew more about it, as much as my great-grandfather did!"

"What is that I just stepped on?" exclaimed Klein, suddenly stooping down. "Why, it is your blue bead! You must have lost it out of your pocket when you were running."

"Perhaps I did," said Guld, taking it. As he dropped it into his pocket his fingers touched the three beads already there. This startled him, but he said nothing about it.

CHAPTER XXIII

A ROYAL SECRET

“I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.”

— W. E. HENLEY.

“Good-bye, Klein! Good-bye; come to-morrow!” said little Guld, as, retracing the path, they stepped into the light before the foster-mother’s door, and he ran up the steps where she with a smile awaited him. Klein stuck his hands in his ragged leather pockets and, whistling, trudged sturdily down the dark road.

For pure joy, Guld hardly knew what to do when he found himself in his own home again. He looked at the sparkling fire whose lightly ascending vapor could not be called smoke, he touched his chair, his plate, his bowl, and pleased his eye with every familiar object about him. Then he went on into his own bedroom, and when he saw the stone basin he plunged his head in the water and again washed himself clean. A new jacket and trousers, of gray stuff, lay on the bed as if waiting for him to take them, and, casting his worn, smoke-stained clothing aside, he dressed himself afresh, feeling light and strong in every limb. The odd, old look that had settled on his features while in the great-aunt’s house, departed entirely and

it may be that it was never a real look at all, but only the effect of a smoke grime.

There was a new red cap on the bed also, but little Guld hesitated over that, looking from it at his own old one which had gone wherever his head went for so long, except while it lay hidden in the crock. At last he took one in each hand and went back into the main room where the brass kettle was humming over the fire and his foster-mother was making ready his favorite supper.

"Rhea," said this little royal kobold, "if I wear the new cap, you must keep the old one, and then whatever you tell me I shall mind."

"Dear little Guld," she replied, "I don't want you to mind me because of the cap, but because you believe me that I tell you right things."

"Then hide it," said Guld, "so that no one can get power over me with it."

"No one can get power over you with it," she said, "you always have power over yourself."

"O Rhea," exclaimed Guld, "don't you know cave-folks have to do just what is told them if any one gets something of theirs to hold, and it is almost always a cap?"

She smiled and shook her head.

"You know," persisted Guld, "how Gurth took Rod's cap that night and made him beg my pardon. And those girls to-day had the great-aunt's needle. She trembled all over and let them have their own way!"

"Guld," said Rhea, "you are going to be the king and I will tell you a royal secret. It is a wise and convenient thing to have such a rule in our country, to secure immediate obedience. The kobolds have always been taught to believe that they must obey every wish of him who has taken their caps. But it is after all a custom and not a necessity, and this a king ought to know."

Guld felt very light-hearted after he heard this, and he began to wonder why he had not always known it without having to be told.

His supper was now ready, and never had anything tasted so delicious to him. When it was over, he moved his chair near his foster-mother, and said,

"Now I am going to tell you things."

"May I hear them too?" said a deep voice at the door, and in strode Gurth. He had come to make sure with his own eyes that little Guld was at home again.

Then Guld related his story. He told about the great-aunt, her maps and her plans, and how she knew of a cave full of weapons. He told about his going to Uncle Groat's house, at the top of the steep hill, and how he gathered fagots in the darkest regions and found water and light for the kobolds. He told how he went with Brand down the old hazardous path into the mines, and how he had seen the miners at work, and visited their homes and slept in Brand's house. He told about the dashing torrent and the white columned cave. He even told about the stone-treasure and the row of stones with the button-balls on them.

"And here's the gold piece!" he said, producing it, for he had not forgotten to change his treasures into his new pockets. "See! Toby says that stands for King Guld!"

"Did they find out your name?" asked Rhea anxiously.

"Oh! no," said Guld; "I did not tell them that. They called me 'little Master' down there."

Gurth sat silent, turning the gold-piece over and over in his hand. He thought of the brooding plots that lay hidden in the hearts of the kobolds in the darkest regions. He thought of the discontent of the miners, and of Brand in whom he had for some time suspected a waiting foe.

At last, giving back the gold-piece, he rose to go, saying,

"It is wonderful how a block of stone is cut and hammered into a carven bowl, but more wonderful yet how a child is made into a king."

And as he went his way home alone, he said softly to himself,

"Perhaps the old king was not so unwise after all!"

When Guld laid his happy head upon his own pillow that night, his last thought before he dropped asleep was,

"Oh! I forgot to tell about the blue beads!"

CHAPTER XXIV

UNCLE BONN

"And Sweet Woods, where they are, cannot but yield great Profit."
— LORD BACON.

"There was neither sun
Nor moon, nor do I think of any stars,
Yet there was light, and there were cedar trees,
And there were sycamores."

— EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON.

It was not long after this that the time came for little Guld's visit to the woods and the wood-cutters. Uncle Bonn himself sent word that on a certain day he would come, bringing a load of carefully-cut sticks for the foster-mother's fire, and would take Guld and perhaps Peer home with him.

The day arrived, and long before the noon-spot shone Uncle Bonn's stout little ponies stopped at the door. Uncle Bonn himself unloaded the wood and piled it in a hollow of the rock. The wood had a pleasant, spicy fragrance which Rhea liked.

Uncle Bonn wore a short coat and trousers of dark grey stuff, and a round, low hat under which his grey shaggy eyebrows and eyes looked like caves with fires in them. He had a grey beard, and his face, what

could be seen of it, was more ruddy than brown. Although quite old, he was strong and active. He was known to be very wise and very quick-tempered; he used strange ejaculations, and little kobolds were apt to scamper away when they saw him coming. But the king had always trusted him and Rhea did the same. She now praised the choice wood.

"Hopscobble!" said Uncle Bonn gruffly, for he did not take to compliments. She laughed, Guld laughed, and then Uncle Bonn laughed too.

"Now we are off!" he said, helping Guld up on the cart-seat, and turning the ponies.

"Good-bye!" said little Guld.

"Good-bye!" said Rhea, glad to see his pleasure.

At Gurth's house they stopped, and Mata and Sada, who were watching, called out,

"They have come, Peer!"

Out came Peer and climbed to the cart. Two happier cave-boys never were than Guld and he, as the ponies left the well-known road and trudged on through a part of the country where Guld had never set his foot.

The road was not so dark but that they could see houses, and kobolds moving about at work. Between the rocks around and above them a little light crept in here and there, not in direct rays, but softly illuminating the region. Presently they came to a hill up which the ponies tugged the cart, and at the top the space widened. It was something like a moonlight night, only there was no moon, no stars, no deep blue

sky. Guld beheld not far ahead what seemed to him dark pillars spreading out above and interlacing.

"The trees! The trees!" cried Peer. "May we get out here?"

Uncle Bonn was willing, so Guld and Peer jumped down to the ground and entered the woods. It was very still there except for the distant sound of axes. But at times there was a little rustling of the leaves overhead when a breeze stole in from some unknown quarter. There were paths winding about, safe to travel, though not free from rocks and stumps.

"Now," said Peer, "let's climb!"

So saying, he went quickly up one of the biggest trees, and stepped out on a long limb where Guld could see him. Up followed Guld, and went out on another limb, for he was now even more agile than Peer. Then higher still, with shouts and laughter, they ran about in the tree-tops like squirrels, hiding among the leaves and swinging on the bending boughs. They could go from one tree-top to another without descending. Once they lost each other and met about ten trees distant from where they started. It was great sport while it lasted, but there were other things Peer wanted to show, so at last they swung themselves down from the end of a bough and were ready for a fresh start.

They could hear, not far away, theplash of a brook upon the stones, and when they reached it Guld knelt down and let the water run between his fingers, it was so cool and pleasant to the touch. It would have been

very pretty in the sunshine, and it was pretty even in this gray light.

"Where does it come from, and where does it go?" asked Guld.

"Out of the rocks and into the rocks," said Peer.

They walked by the side of the brook, till it flowed beneath the great rocks out of sight. There was some space between it and the rock above, but it was all darkness. Peer took a flint from his pocket, and lighting a bit of dry wood laid it on a chip and sent it floating down the stream. Guld and he held their heads low and watched it sail a long, long way, the flame growing tinier all the time until it disappeared.

"This is a very wonderful kingdom," said Guld, straightening himself; "did my father, the King, ever come to these woods?"

"I think he did," replied Peer. "He knew Uncle Bonn very well. But the king's grandfather went everywhere. They say that not one corner escaped him."

The day was passing, and in this part of the cave-country, where there was more natural light and fewer lanterns than elsewhere, the approach of evening was seen by the deepening gloom. Peer now led Guld by the wood-cutters, whose busy axes still broke the silence. Here there were stumps and logs lying about, and Guld would have liked to linger if he had not been going to Uncle Bonn's house, which was now the place he wanted most of all to see. They came to it sooner than he expected.

Going around a huge boulder, projecting from the foot of a steep ledge, they suddenly came upon Uncle Bonn, sitting on a bench by the side of his own door, his head bowed as if he were asleep. But he looked up so quickly when he heard steps that he must have been only busily thinking.

His house was built of logs, but the ledge served as the rear wall. There was a stunted tree close by, and altogether it was a very picturesque spot for this underground region. Guld thought it very pretty indeed.

"I have taken little Guld all about, Uncle Bonn," said Peer cheerfully.

"Hops cobble!" exclaimed Uncle Bonn. "All about?"

"Yes, and now I will run home," Peer went on; "I see Robin starting and we will go together. Good-bye, little Guld! Good-bye, Uncle Bonn!"

"Who is Robin?" asked Guld, as Peer set off on a run with a cave-boy who had suddenly appeared on the scene.

"He's the youngest wood-cutter of all," replied Bonn. "He lives down Peer's way, and he's an honest fellow. Now come to supper, little Guld; sister Hippa is sure to have it ready."

And Uncle Bonn led Guld through the door into a broad room where there were wide, easy seats, such as old men love, and a curious round lantern hanging from the roof.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BONN GUEST CHAMBER

“That narrow window, I expect,
Serves but to let the dusk in—”

—LEWIS CARROLL.

The table was set for three, and a pot was steaming over the fire on the hearth. Hippa, a thin featured cave-woman with a grave, unsmiling face, filled the blue bowls and placed a plate of hard round cakes upon the table.

“What have you given us to-night, good Hippa?” asked Uncle Bonn.

“Pease-porridge and scones,” she replied.

Little Guld thought the supper extremely good as he took his first spoonful and followed it up with a bite from a scone. He felt very comfortable here in Uncle Bonn’s house.

Supper over, they sat by the fire and Uncle Bonn watched closely, from under his shaggy eyebrows, the boy who was to be a king some day, and liked his earnest young face.

“He shall never meet any trouble in my province,” he said to himself.

“Have you a map of the kobold kingdom, Uncle Bonn?” asked little Guld.

"I have," replied Uncle Bonn, and bringing out a roll from a shelf in the rock, he spread it upon the table.

Guld bent over it, resting upon his elbows, and studied it with deep interest. It was different in some respects from the great-aunt's map; it lacked two or three roads which hers gave, but then it gave others which hers did not have.

"Perhaps no one kobold knows the whole kingdom," he thought, "but a king ought to know."

There were two small circles and a notched line which Guld did not understand, and he asked Uncle Bonn what they meant.

"I can show you better than I can tell you," said Uncle Bonn. "Wait till to-morrow and the day after to-morrow."

On this map Guld found readily the foster-mother's home, the workshops, the cavern, Gurth's road, and even the great-aunt's house and the steep road that led to Uncle Groat's house, but no indication of the dark region beyond that, nor of the precipitous path by which Brand had carried him to the mines. The wood-cutter's province was given, broad and irregular in shape, with one main road leading to it, though Guld noticed here and there a break in the outline, which might mean something omitted. The field road was given, straight and easy, but coming to an abrupt end.

"The great gate is there which is open only on Market-day," said Uncle Bonn. "It opens from the

other side; we have nothing to do with it. The kingdom ends there."

"Where does this road go?" asked Guld, pointing to the dark road which struck off by the spring where he had met Klein.

Uncle Bonn stood up to look.

"That divides in two," he said; "it turns on the right down to the mines, but on the left it is untraveled and full of danger. It ends in a black abyss."

"Why is it left open?" asked Guld.

"No one has ordered it otherwise. It has been kept as a means of defense. If enemies entered our land they could be driven there to fall and perish."

"I shall have it closed," said Guld.

"Hopscobble!" exclaimed Uncle Bonn. "You talk like a child! You may sing another tune when you have counted your rebels."

"I shall have it closed," repeated Guld.

"All in good time! All in good time!" said Uncle Bonn. He had no fear but that Guld would change his mind when he came to know more. Many a time when he himself was angered, he had threatened to throw those who offended him down over the black rocks, but it was well he had never done it, for he was a kind old cave-man after all and it would have broken his heart to think of it afterwards.

Little Guld looked at the map, and around the log-walled room, and at the pleasant fire, and bye and bye found himself growing sleepy. Then Uncle Bonn took a small stone bowl which held oil and a lighted

wick, or what answered for a wick, and stepping around a corner of rock in the ledge, called Guld to follow. It made Guld wide awake to find himself going up a steep stairway where he had not suspected there was any stairway at all. At the top was a little square room with a bed and one square window. In a corner of the room a tiny stream trickled down the wall, whose sound was as companionable as the ticking of a clock.

"This room is not a cave; it is hewn out," said Uncle Bonn, as he set the lamp in a niche. "It is very old, and it is said that there has never been a king who has not slept here at least once in his life. It is the Bonn guest-chamber. It is very safe; you have nothing to fear."

"I am not at all afraid," said Guld, who was very much pleased with the chamber in the rock.

"You will know when it is time to get up," said Uncle Bonn, "by the window growing light. When you can see, it will be morning."

"Oh! what a good way to tell!" exclaimed little Guld. "I never slept in a room with a window before!"

But, although he did not know it, his own room in the castle wing had a little window high up and out of sight through which a pearly light stole softly in.

Uncle Bonn now left him and groped down the stairs to his own room, which was not hewn, but a well hidden cave in the ledge.

Little Guld was soon in bed and fell asleep before

the oil in the bowl was burnt out. Once he awoke, but his eyes opened upon utter darkness, so he turned over and went to sleep again. The next time he awoke, the window framed a square of soft gray light.

"It is time to get up!" he exclaimed gladly, springing out of bed. When he went to the window he saw rocks above and below, but beyond them it was all soft gray.

"I like this place very much!" he said to himself.

When he went down the steep stairs and into the house-room, Uncle Bonn was standing in the doorway giving orders to the wood-cutters who were going to work. The wood-cutters were very clever-looking kobolds with shrewd but not unkindly faces, and each one carried an axe. Some of them had metal axes which they had obtained by traffic on market-day, while others had stone ones of a clumsier make, but flinty enough to do good service.

These cave-men all wore red caps. You know that kind of dry lichen that grows sometimes in thin soil on rocks, gray stems with red tops. A group of wood-cutters seen standing still at a distance might look like those lichens, though of course rather larger.

Guld was glad he had on his gray clothes and red cap. It made him feel more at home.

"They'll think I'm a new wood-cutter," he said to himself, and that was really what some of them thought, for they did not know that little King Guld was a visitor in their province. Robin could have told them, but he was late that morning.

"Do nothing but chop small wood to-day," was Uncle Bonn's last order, and then he sat down to breakfast with Guld.

"What have you for us this time, good Hippa?" he asked.

"Milk, and potatoes baked in the coals," she replied with gravity.

"Oh! how good they are!" said little Guld as he began to eat.

"Hops cobble!" exclaimed Uncle Bonn, pretending great alarm. "You will be trying to rob me of my housekeeper when you open up the royal castle!"

Then he laughed and Guld laughed, but Hippa's face never changed. She was of a very serious disposition.

"Now," said Uncle Bonn after breakfast, "what will you choose to do to-day, little King Guld?"

"To find the circles and the notched line that you can show me better than you can tell me," answered Guld, remembering the map.

"Hoh!" cried Uncle Bonn. "You ask for the biggest things first! All in good time! But I must sit awhile to consider."

So saying, he planted himself on the bench by the door and bent his head.

"May I search and see if I can find them myself?" asked Guld.

"Oh! aye! yes!" said Uncle Bonn, never once supposing that Guld could discover what had always been so well concealed.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PRINCESS THEDA

“Slowly he climbed the narrow way
That reached the entrance grim and gray.”

— SIR WALTER SCOTT.

Guld walked a little way from the door and looked about him. He remembered that on Uncle Bonn's map the unexplained notched line was not far from the stunted tree.

“Just about ten steps, I should think,” he said to himself, looking closely at the rock at his feet, which showed no sign. Then he observed the massive wall, not built by kobolds, but consisting of natural rock with an uneven surface. Guld measured ten steps from the tree and found himself standing by a slight projection.

“I will climb upon that,” he thought, “and then maybe I can see something more.”

Once on the narrow shelf, he saw another which had not been visible below. To this he leaped, and another still came in view.

“Notches!” he exclaimed with great satisfaction.
The fourth wound around a boulder and there was no fifth. But as the fourth ended at a fissure in the

ledge-like wall Guld did not hesitate but slipped in and went along a little way until he was stopped by a large stone rolling directly in front of him.

"How easily it rolled!" he said to himself. "Perhaps I can roll it away just as easily."

He put his shoulder to it and it moved half over, leaving room to pass by. He heard a low exclamation and retreating steps. It was not very dark here and a narrow path led upward. Someone, he was sure, disappeared around the first turn and he followed with quick feet. Another turn and he came upon a little patch of habitable country, where a kobold was at work digging, and on the doorstep of a small log-house sat a black-eyed kobold girl, with cheeks something of the color of Uncle Bonn's, breathing quickly as if she had been running. Guld laughed when their eyes met and she laughed too.

"Nobody ever found the way here before except those who always knew it," said the kobold, stopping his work and looking keenly at little Guld.

A kobold woman now came to the door and would have led her black-eyed charge inside, but there was instant objection.

"Come with me, Theda!" she said.

"No, he is my company," replied Theda.

"Who are you?" asked the kobold of Guld.

"I come from Uncle Bonn," he answered. "He said he would show me where the notched line led, but I found it myself."

"It leads up here to my house," said Theda glee-

fully, "so he must have meant for you to visit me. Now come in and I will show you my window."

With that she led him into the house, which, being set against the rock, had a cavern room in the rear, strewn with rush mats. There was a line of light, not sunshine, but light, extending across the floor, and Theda pointed to a small opening from which it came.

"Look through!" she said.

Guld looked and saw blue at the end, nothing but blue.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied, "I often wonder."

Guld remembered the glimpse he had when he and Klein opened the grandfather's gate.

"Don't you wish the window were bigger so you could go out and see what it is?" he asked.

"Oh! no," she exclaimed with a little shiver of fear. "I like to wonder but I don't want to see what it is."

"How do you come to have a window like this?" asked Guld. "I never saw one before except that in the room where I slept last night."

"Did Uncle Bonn let you sleep there?" she cried. "Why, that is the royal bed chamber. And I have a window because I am royal myself. You needn't look so surprised; I really am! I am the Princess Theda."

"I never heard of you," said Guld.

"Oh! no; I am very little known. I cannot come to the throne, you know, because my cousin Guld is the

king. This is my home and Uncle Bonn is my guardian. Hippa knows I am a princess, but the wood-cutters do not. Uncle Bonn keeps it a secret. I don't mind telling."

"I am very glad you told me," said Guld.

"Now I will show you something else," said Theda, leading him outside, to the top of a craggy rock. After a little search in the crannies of the rock, she whispered:

"Look here!"

There was light enough for Guld to see two bright eyes and soft purplish gray feathers. It was a pigeon on her nest. Theda touched the pigeon gently and she rose and flew away out of sight, where they could not tell. The whirr of her wings and her swift soaring motion made Guld's heart beat with delight.

"What was it?" he asked.

"A bird," said Theda, "she will come back after we go. Don't you think my home is in a pleasant place up here? You wouldn't believe it, but there is more than shows. I have a grotto full of shining crystals, and a fountain. And see what a pretty necklace Uncle Bonn has given me. I don't see where he got it."

The necklace was made of shells, a long flat kind, pink and white, each one pierced and threaded. Neither Guld nor Theda knew what shells were and he wondered as much as she where Uncle Bonn found them.

"I have a few curious old stone beads, unstrung —" Theda was beginning to say, when they were both startled by a loud exclamation.

"Hopscobble! What's doing here!"

And there was Uncle Bonn, quite out of breath, frowning with all his might, but he could not frighten Guld and Theda. They ran to meet him.

"Friends, hey?" he asked with a droll smile.

"Yes, we are friends," said Theda, "and I am going home with you when you go, to visit Hippa, and to ride on your ponies with Guld."

"How did you guess my name?" asked Guld in great astonishment, for he was sure he had not spoken it.

"Oh! I knew after you told me where Uncle Bonn put you to sleep!" she said with a merry laugh.

The attendant kobolds, who were near enough to hear, now observed Guld with the keenest interest.

"Well, come then!" said Uncle Bonn, "and you may ride the ponies."

So little King Guld and Princess Theda went with Uncle Bonn along the path, out upon the notched rock and down into the woodcutter's country.

Then they mounted the ponies and rode through the forest paths and by the stream. Guld had never had companionship like this before, and he felt great sympathy and love for his cousin Theda. He wondered why he had not been told about her and why they had not been brought up together. But the truth was, some of the old counsellors felt a jealousy

for their young king, and did not want it to be spread among the kobolds that there was a little princess in the land, for fear a party might form for her and make trouble.

So they said nothing about her, and even the foster-mother had not felt inclined to break the silence.

CHAPTER XXVII

A CAVE WITH A SKY

"Cave-like but roofless overhead
And made of verdant banks instead
Of any rocks."

— E. B. BROWNING.

Guld and Theda were now allowed to roam at will in the forest region, for there were no disloyal kobolds there and no paths of danger. The wood-cutters always touched their little red caps when they saw them coming.

"I suppose, if it were not for me, you would have the crown," said Guld one day.

"Yes, I should," Theda replied cheerfully, "but I don't mind your having it."

"But I am king! It is my kingdom," he said.

"Oh! yes; I know that!" said Theda, no whit disturbed, for she was a happy hearted little princess and thought nothing else but to see Guld made king.

On this day Uncle Bonn was not about the house nor yet among the wood-cutters, which was unusual.

"I wonder where he is," said Guld.

"I wonder, too," said Theda; "sometimes he is gone two or three days together and will not tell where he has been."

They were at one of the great arching boundary walls, and Guld stopped to consider. He had a good memory for landmarks, and this place, he felt sure, was near a circle, as put down on the map, and also near one of the imperfect lines, so he looked closely about him. There was no cave, nor any crevice which might lead to a cave, no shelving rocks to be climbed, only a little way on was the dark hollow into which the stream flowed. But — Guld stepped forward — yes, there was something uncommon about the stream on this particular day. Someone had rolled a great stone down on one side so that the current swerved and left a part of the rocky bed bare for quite a way in the hollow.

"See!" exclaimed Guld, "there is a chance to explore the hollow! It may lead to a cave. I will go first and call you, Theda, if I can keep on. If there is nothing I will come back."

"Oh! I hope you will find something!" she replied, eagerly, as he stepped across the stone and, bending his head, groped his way over the slippery rocks by the side of the stream, soon disappearing from sight.

A few moments after, he called back:

"Come! It isn't hard after you get started!"

With the greatest delight Theda now crossed the stone and, planting her little feet firmly, crept step by step after Guld. He had reached a turn where he awaited her. This turn led away from the stream, and there was room to stand upright.

"Oh!" exclaimed Theda, when she was at Guld's side, "how pretty it is in here!"

The light, though dim, was enough to show rich green mosses clinging to the rocks, and as Guld and Theda went farther on it increased until suddenly, almost dazzled, they found themselves in a circular space, walled by rocky banks, which, ascending and curving over, made almost the shape of an inverted bowl, only so large that it was fifty feet in diameter. They called it a cave. It was full of trees, and there was an opening overhead which showed all blue, through which a little sunlight fell. The trees had vivid green foliage and there was fresh velvety green grass underfoot.

There, with his arms stretched up under his head, lay Uncle Bonn on a mossy bank fast asleep!

Little King Guld and Princess Theda were both overjoyed to think they had outwitted the dear old counsellor kobold and found him in his secret haunt. They laughed, and he sprang to his feet.

"Hopscobble!" he exclaimed angrily.

But when he saw who they were, the frown vanished from his face. For these were the royal children and he had meant in due time to tell Guld at least of this retreat, but not until he was older and wiser. Guld had been growing older and wiser now for some time, and Uncle Bonn suddenly realized it.

"He will soon wear the crown!" he said to himself, and then he looked kindly down at Theda who was not to wear it.

"Now," said Guld triumphantly, "I have found out what makes the different color in your cheeks, Uncle Bonn!"

"Yes, yes!" said Theda, dancing around him, "we have found out now!"

The good old kobold smiled.

"But keep it for a royal secret," he said.

It did not take long to explore the small round cave-valley. Theda was soon ready to leave it, but Guld wanted to stand with his head held back, looking up at the blue.

"I love it," he said.

"It is just like my window, only bigger," said Theda. "I like to look at it now and then, but it seems unnatural and I want to go back."

"Yes, it is time to go back," said Uncle Bonn.

So they all three made their way into the defile and back through the dark hollow, from which they emerged by the side of the stream. Uncle Bonn then rolled the stone aside, and the water again filled all the space.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A ROD IN PICKLE

"More like than anything
To one long prisoned in a twilight cave
With hovering bats for all companionship."
— EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON.

As long as Guld stayed in the wood-cutter's region his cousin Theda was his daily companion and they became more and more friendly. He told her what he wanted to do for the miners and how he meant to close up the dangerous road that led to the dens, and how he planned to make all the kobold people contented and happy. She nodded and smiled. She was sure her cousin Guld would be a very good king.

But Guld's visit came to an end. A rumor reached him that the hill-men were coming soon to keep market-day with the kobolds, and he wanted to be at home.

He did not wait for Bonn to take him in the cart, but went on foot like a pilgrim. He looked like a sturdy young wood-cutter, and no one who met him would have guessed he was the king.

As he walked swiftly down the hill which led away from the woods he saw at the bottom a figure gliding

behind a rock as if to hide, and when he reached the spot a stone flew out and hit him on the shoulder. He darted quickly around the rock and found Rod curled up so cleverly on the ground that he would have passed him unnoticed as a big brown stone, if he had not been roused to alertness.

As it was, he caught him by the shoulder and pulled him up.

"What are you about, Rod?" he asked sharply.

"Wish I hadn't done it!" whined Rod. "Thought you was Robin."

And then he began to kick and pound violently, and even to bite in order to escape, but Guld held him firm. For not only had Guld grown older and wiser, but determination fired his veins and gave him what Peer, if he had seen him, would have called "main strength."

When Rod had fought in vain and still could not escape that compelling hand, he stopped short, with a sullen face, and looked upon the ground.

"Why did you want to hurt Robin?" asked Guld.

"Hate him! Hate all the wood-cutters!" said Rod surlily.

"Oh! that is because you cut crooked sticks," said Guld. He pulled Rod's cap from his head and the wretched kobold quivered.

"I don't need to take your cap," said Guld, pointing to the little notch in the brim, "I have the piece of leather that fits it."

"Are you King Guld?" exclaimed Rod in terror.

Guld smiled and replaced the cap on Rod's head.

"I am going to give you back your promise about the bats," he said, "and take another promise from you. Tell me that you will go to work under Uncle Bonn again, and cut the best and straightest sticks you can! You can do well, Rod, if you try!"

Rod felt a dull sense of amazement, and a powerlessness to resist.

"I will go!" he said in a low voice.

"Go now!" said Guld, removing his hand.

Rod started without more words. He set his face toward the hill and climbed it, not once looking back. Guld watched him till he disappeared and then resumed his own way, thinking of the royal secret.

"He would not have minded me, if it had not been for the cap!" he said to himself.

That night, when Gurth, the counsellor, came to the wing of the castle to greet the king's son, Guld asked him this question,

"Can I make Rod mind without letting him believe what is not true? Are there other royal secrets?"

Gurth drew his shaggy eyebrows together, and said:

"Don't quit one foothold till you find another, or you will all go down in the bog together!"

Then he added, after a moment,

"A king's thought is deep and broad and high. There are other royal secrets, little Guld!"

CHAPTER XXIX

MARKET DAY

"Of which if I shall tellen all the array,
Then would it occupy a summer's day."

— CHAUCER.

The great market-day was at hand, and Guld was eager to see the kobolds gathering in multitudes from every part and the stranger people coming with their wares. The market-place was to be in the broad fields where there were great stone tables standing in half circles on either side of the road.

"Have you ever been to market?" asked Guld of the foster mother.

"Never but once," she said, and a far-away, dreamy look hovered in her eyes as she spoke.

When the day came Guld put on his old brown leather clothes.

"I am going with Peer," he said, "and help carry wares. Then I can stand in all the crowd, among the strangers, and they will not know I am Guld."

"That may be best," said Rhea.

When Guld reached the fields with Peer, carrying the braided mats of rushes that Mata and Sada had made, they saw Gurth at an immense stone table

crowded with bowls, mortars, plates, stone axes and knives from the workshops. All the best work of the year was collected, and most of the workmen were there to see the display.

On another table were mats and caps, miners' aprons and tool-bags made of leather. Hither came Klein, whistling his merry tune and bringing some of the great-aunt's knitting, together with bone needles which he himself had scraped smooth.

In another quarter were shining crystals, pieces of asbestos, fibrous, with a silky lustre, three-sided prisms of tourmaline, agate and carnelian, lumps of rusty colored quartz with veins of gold, and nuggets of solid gold besides. These came from the mines, and from granite recesses, and were guarded by sharp-eyed kobolds who moved about restlessly and muttered in low voices to one another.

From the dark limestone caverns in the farthest part of the kingdom, where little regular work was carried on, there came scowling kobolds, bringing strange stones in their hands, whose names they did not know, glassy rock crystal, masses of sulphur, iron pyrites, white and red spar, emery, brown crystals, and red ones shaped like little pyramids. They knew these things found ready market among the strangers, and they ranged them on a table of their own.

Guld moved from throng to throng unnoticed, but intent and pleased. Nobody knew who he was, and even Peer, when he lost sight of him, could not pick him out in the crowd. Suddenly Guld saw Uncle

Groat leaning upon his staff. He had brought a few smooth arrow heads for sale as curiosities. Guld ran to him, pulling off his cap as he did so, that he might be recognized.

"Is that you, little wight?" asked Uncle Groat in a tone of great pleasure. "I was looking for you!"

Kirt, who was with some of his fellows not far away, said: "Who is that talking to Groat?"

"That's uncle Groat's servant!" said Blick with a grimace. And then two or three kobolds piped up,

"Oh, Oh! Uncle Groat's servant! He gave us light, he gave us water!"

Kirt now for the first time, not knowing who he was, looked at Guld without malice. He felt indeed a little respect for him, because with an old discarded pickaxe he had brought water from the rock for a thirsty clan.

"He's no fool!" was his rough comment.

Guld slipped away again, putting on his cap, and mingling with the multitude. But not before Uncle Groat had laid in his hand the thing he had wanted to give him, a strangely carved large blue stone bead.

"This makes five!" he thought, with some wonder.

Meanwhile, from all quarters of the kingdom, numbers of kobolds were still arriving, some offering fire-stones and hammer-stones for sale, others, from Uncle Bonn's province, bringing fagots of spicy wood neatly tied, while others yet came empty handed, eager only to see the crowds and the excitement.

But what interested Guld most of all was the com-

ing of the strangers. The great gate swung open, and a band of hill-men, bearing burdens, came in procession toward the market-place. Their faces were grave and they looked wise and strong. They marched in order to the tables set apart for their use, and unloading their sacks set forth red and blue and yellow pottery, woven stuffs, metal tools and weapons, copper kettles, lanterns, skins, oils, urns with pictured figures, pails of bark, and baskets of rush, and wooden plates and spoons finely carved. The handsomest urn was to be the prize won in the race.

Guld kept as near the strangers as he could, wondering at their bearing and the wares they brought. He caught a red bowl, which came near rolling to the ground, and restored it to the owner who smiled upon him and said,

“ You are a clever little kobold! ”

Then the traffic began. The miners exchanged their gold and crystals readily with the hill-men for metal tools and weapons, for lanterns and pails, and other wares. All the odd-shaped stones soon found buyers, and the fragrant fagots were destined for the hill-king. The best of Gurth’s bowls and mortars, ground the smoothest and shaped the most evenly, were taken and paid for with pottery and woven stuffs, skins and hatchets. Mata and Sada traded their mats for gowns. Klein bought a copper kettle for the great-aunt, and Uncle Bonn secured a huge yellow pitcher to carry to Hippa.

CHAPTER XXX

THE HILL-MEN

“For now events impel each other on
And higher powers than beadle's usher them.”

— JOHN DAVIDSON.

All the while Guld stood near the strangers and watched them with so much interest that they looked kindly upon him.

“Is your country like ours?” he asked one of the younger strangers.

“No,” was the reply; “ours is broader, lighter, and things grow more freely. We live among the hills, but there is no part where we cannot look out if we choose.”

“Look out!” repeated Guld.

“Yes, and step out. I often step out,” said the stranger. “Now here in your country that is impossible.”

“What is out?” asked Guld.

“If I told you over and over you would not know,” he answered; “no walls, no roof, no lamps, yet brighter than anything you ever saw, with flowers and songs, and things that I cannot tell you because the words are not in your language.”

"I should like to step out," said Guld.

By this time there was a lull in the buying and selling. Almost everything in the market had changed owners and there was a call for games and races according to the old custom.

The kobolds all joined in playing quoits, and after that in flinging stones at a mark. Then they played leap-frog, and that was followed by a game like our "duck on a rock." Then came a cry for the races. The first races were for the purpose of giving all a chance, and from these the best runners were chosen for the final prize race. Wood-cutters, stone workers, miners, hill-men, whoever would, might join in the race. Guld came forward with the rest, and no one but Peer and Robin knew that the light-footed kobold at their side, in the old leather suit, was little king Guld. Toby saw him, looked twice, and said to himself,

"That's little Master! He's got his cap!" Only two of the strangers ran; they were young and swift. The first races were helter-skelter, and the crowd kept thinning out rapidly. By the time the third race began, almost all the kobolds had given up the contest, but Kirt kept on, and Peer and Robin. Toby too was eager to try again, and there were a few more, among them little Guld, in his brown suit.

The fourth and final race found the two strangers, Kirt, Peer, and little Guld, ready to start, side by side.

Away they sped, like the wind, along the track and

around the broad field. Little Guld's feet flew as if they had wings. He kept one thought only as he ran.

"A king ought to win! A king ought to win!"

He knew when he passed Peer, he knew when he passed one stranger, he knew with a jubilant thrill when he out-stripped Kirt. One more plunge ahead like a bird in the air and, a second in advance of the fleetest stranger, he reached the goal!

"Hooray! Hooray!" cried all the kobolds.

"Who is it? Who is it?" each one asked his neighbor and only two,—yes, three, for Klein guessed it,—knew that the winner was little King Guld.

This was the prize race, and the tallest and oldest stranger placed the beautiful urn in Guld's hands, and then called aloud,

"Let your king come forth to hail the winner!"

"We have no king!" cried the miners stormily.

"Little Guld is our king, but we have not crowned him!" shouted the wood-cutters and the stone workers.

"We have no king! We have no king!" yelled the crowd of kobolds who had come with Kirt.

CHAPTER XXXI

CHOOSE YOUR RULER

"And those things do best please me,
That befall preposterously."

— SHAKESPEARE.

The youngest stranger stepped forward eagerly.
"Let me teach you a new game," he said. "A whole nation can play it, and it is called, 'Choose your Ruler.' Think among yourselves which kobolds are the best liked in the kingdom, and each of you make a choice. He who has the most on his side shall be your ruler for the day."

As soon as the kobolds caught the idea of this new game, they ran to and fro excitedly to consult with one another, for while it was only a game, as they knew, yet it was like a spark to powder.

The miners drew together in a body by themselves, and whispered this and that in an uncertain fashion. But Toby sought Brand and said in a low voice,

"Little Master is here! He has got his cap, and he won the race!"

The kobolds from the darker regions held their own consultations, and finally reached a decision which Kirt approved by a nod of his head.

But the wood-cutters and stone-workers, who were

grouped in another quarter, said very little. They were loyal, and from first to last they thought of little King Guld alone.

It was evident that there were three parties. Each party was counted by the younger strangers, who took a great interest in the game. Gurth, who had been at a distance and had only just heard of what was going on, came pushing anxiously forward, hoping to prevent the whole thing, for he felt there was danger in that kind of game. But the strangers had finished counting and were comparing results.

Then the youngest stranger sprang up on one of the stone tables, where all could see him, and waved for silence.

"It is most wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Your votes are so evenly divided that one is not chosen above another. A third of you have named for your ruler one called 'little Master.' Will 'little Master' come forward and stand by me?"

In the excitement nobody but Klein recognised the little kobold in brown who stepped to the stranger's side and cast a friendly glance at the crowd of miners. Brand led the shout.

"Hooray! Hooray! for little Master!" And all the miners joined and cried, "Hooray! Hooray!"

The stranger continued, "A third of you have named for your ruler one called 'Uncle Groat's Servant.' Will 'Uncle Groat's Servant' come forward?"

"I am here," said Guld, pulling off his cap, and

turning his pleasant face towards Kirt and all his band. Kirt himself led the outcry.

“Hooray! Hooray! for ‘Uncle Groat’s Servant!’” And all the band cried again and again, “Hooray!”

“A third of you,” continued the stranger, “desire little King Guld to be your ruler.”

Gurth stood, pale and stern, with the loyal workmen, who held themselves shoulder to shoulder, while murmurs were heard in the opposing parties.

“Is little King Guld here?” asked the stranger gently, conscious that the game was arousing more than wonted feeling.

Guld replaced his cap, made a step forward, and looked taller than he had ever looked before in his life, as he folded his arms and regarded his people with beaming eyes, looking from one party to another, the friend of all.

“I am here,” he said.

Gurth uttered a mighty shout:

“Hurrah! for little King Guld!”

And all the workmen caught it up with wild, glad hurrahs. And the other two parties, catching the wonderful meaning of the three-fold choice, cried as if they would never have done,

“Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! for King Guld!”

Guld took all this very simply and quietly. He was glad because the hearts of his people turned to him, and he meant to be their servant just as truly as to be their king.

CHAPTER XXXII

GONE

"Why, Master, they should not yet be gone out of eye-shot, yet gone they are. What is become of them? Are they sunk into the earth?"

— WILLIAM MORRIS.

"Now," said Gurth and all the other wise counsellors, "we must hasten the coronation. The kobolds were never so united before and never will be again. Guld must be crowned at once and proclaimed king."

This was when the market was ended and the kobolds were all scattered to their many homes, eager to tell the story of the new game and its wonderful result.

But when they sought for Guld they could not find him; he was gone. All that Rhea could say was that Guld had given her the beautiful urn and had told her he was going on a journey.

"He did not go with the hill-men," she added, reading the fear in Gurth's sombre eyes. "They had already departed, and the gate was shut."

All the counsellors could discover was this,—Guld had not gone alone, he had taken Klein with him. Only Peer knew more. Guld had asked him too to

go upon this journey, but he was unwilling. He had followed a little way, through the dark narrow passage and into the glittering cavern-hall. There Guld and Klein had left him. He saw them climb up the cavern side and put their shoulders against a great hewn rock. Then there was a burst of light that blinded him and, when he could see again, they were gone and the rock was in its place. Yet not quite in its place, for when Guld went through, he set a small stone in the gateway, so that the gate stood a little open for his return.

Peer kept all this to himself, but day after day he went into the cavern hall and looked at the narrow line of light which showed that the gate was still ajar.

The counsellors were disturbed. Guld had thrown away the lucky hour in which the hearts of all the kobolds were as the heart of one.

“All is lost now!” they murmured.

As the time went by and Guld did not come, they met often in debate, for they knew there were many things that might prevent his ever returning to the kobold country. They were perplexed and knew not how to answer the questions of the kobolds. At last came a day when, by agreement of all the counsellors, Uncle Bonn brought the Princess Theda from her hidden home and placed her under Rhea’s care in the wing of the castle.

“She is next of kin,” they said.

The foster-mother received her with gentle kind-

ness, and Theda's merry laugh rang pleasantly through the deserted rooms.

"Guld will come back," she always said, and Rhea too believed that he would come back, so they did not go about with sad faces like the counsellors. The kobolds all awaited his coming, and sometimes one or another ventured to the door to ask Theda if there was any news.

"Not yet," she would say, but so gladsomely that she did not awaken fear.

Once Kirt came. His clan were growing restless. They were suspicious of the counsellors and thought Guld was being kept from the throne because he was a friend to them.

"I wish he would come!" said Theda to Kirt. "There is so much he means to do. He has told me some of the things. One is, he is going to wall up that dangerous place where the dens are."

"He will do that?" demanded Kirt in surprise. Kirt and his clan had more than once been threatened by some angry counsellor with being thrust down that abyss, and they knew it was reckoned upon as a means of defending the king.

"Yes, indeed!" said Theda; "my cousin Guld is afraid some of his people may come to harm there."

Once Brand came, and Theda with her bright smile talked to him about Guld, what his plan was for the miners, and how he meant to have their homes in a lighter region. So everywhere the kobolds all waited for Guld's return and longed to see his face again.

"It is wonderful!" said the counsellors as time wore on. "The people seem more and more resolved upon having Guld to be king!"

"Princess Theda will wear the crown," said Uncle Bonn. "Does not the old song run,

"'A queen shall come laughing to kobold land'?"

"But not till 'twelve beads hang on one strand,'" said the oldest counsellor of all, "and the king's grandfather scattered them far and wide. They can never be got together again. He would not hear a word of any but kings reigning over kobolds."

"Hopscobble!" exclaimed Uncle Bonn.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE COMING BACK OF KING GULD

"Thou art a boy no longer, but a king."

— RICHARD HENRY STODDARD.

But Guld came back. One day the little thread of light in the cavern hall suddenly widened, the great gate moved, and Guld stepped through with Klein close behind him.

"How dark it is in here!" said Klein groping his way down the rocky wall.

"Our eyes will grow used to it again," replied Guld.

They made their way across the crystal floor, and by familiar landmarks out into the dim-lit road and to the workshop caverns.

Gurth looked up and a great joy shone in his face.

"King Guld!" he cried; "King Guld is come! Long live King Guld!"

And all the kobolds sprang forward, shouting and rejoicing. Guld stood among them, taller now than any of them, fearless and smiling.

"Good news!" he exclaimed. "I bring good news! I have found a larger kingdom! This is only the beginning of our country. I am going to lead you all

outside where there is sky and no roof, and where there are flowers and green forests. I cannot tell you the hundredth part, but you will see! I have come back to get you."

This startled the kobolds and frightened them. Gurth shook his head gravely.

"Your people dwell here, King Guld," he said.

"But I am going to lead you all out," replied Guld with confidence; "I will tell you more presently, but now I must go to the foster-mother and Theda."

He turned away with a ringing step, but Klein lingered. He too had grown and was handsomer and merrier than ever.

"It is all true what the king tells you!" he said.

"But what are flowers and sky?" asked the kobolds, crowding around him. "They don't mean anything!"

"No, not till you see them!" said Klein. "But it is all true what King Guld tells you!" Then he ran off, whistling.

Guld strode rapidly to his own home in the wing of the castle, and Theda, who stood watching at the door as was her frequent custom, sprang down the steps to meet him.

"Dear Theda!" he exclaimed.

"O Guld," she cried; "they said you would never come, but I knew you would!"

"I have come to take you all away with me," he said fondly. "Where is Rhea?"

"Up the stairway. I will call her."

"No, I will find her," said Guld, and he ran quickly up the long stairs which in old times he had so shunned.

Rhea was on the landing by the window, rustling the vines and letting in bits of sunshine.

"Dear Rhea," said Guld as she started at his step, "I know now why you love the stairway and the window vines and roses. I have been outside, and I have come back to take you all there with me."

"My dear Guld," she exclaimed, "never leave us again! You have come back a king, and the castle shall be opened and the tower where your father loved to sit, and you shall wear the crown."

"This is only a small part of our kingdom," he answered. "I am going to lead you out. There are a thousand roses outside for one here!"

"I am satisfied with a few," she said gently.

They went down the stairs together and found Theda, rosy and laughing, trying to build up the sweet-scented fire to make a savory broth for Guld's supper. Klein was standing in the doorway.

"May I go straight to the great-aunt's?" he asked, and Guld said:

"Yes, go, Klein; tell them all you can and bid them be ready."

Klein ran off, whistling the cheery old way, but with more trills and turns than ever were heard before in kobold land.

"He learned that from the birds," said Guld.

"I had a gray bird at home," said Theda.

"For one bird there, there are ten thousand outside," said Guld.

"I am satisfied with a few!" said Theda, nodding merrily as she brought out the carved stone bowls and set the table. Afterward, at supper, she told Guld how Kirt had come to seek news of him, and Brand also, and how she had given them cheer.

"My good, wise Theda," said Guld, "you ought to be a queen!"

"The old counsellors came near making one of me," she replied gaily, "but I laughed in their faces, for I knew you would come back."

"I have come back to take my people into a larger kingdom," said Guld.

"O Guld," said Theda, smiling, "forget your roving. Our kingdom is too beautiful to leave. Parts of it are dark, but there the gold and gems grow. Think of the windows and the white shining caverns!"

The foster-mother joined with Theda.

"Here is your castle, Guld," she said, "your throne and your crown."

Meantime word was flying through the kobold country that King Guld had come, and Kirt was soon at the door, his sharp face and restless eyes full of eagerness and concern. Peer came too,—quiet, steady Peer,—and stalwart Brand whose fiery eyes softened whenever he looked at "little Master." Robin came running all the way from the wood region, and Klein slipped in again among the rest.

Guld welcomed them like a king. He loved them

and he had deep thoughts in his heart. Kirt had brought some complaints, and Brand had brought advice, but they forgot all they meant to say.

Guld told them that he had a great project in view, nothing less than the going forth of the whole nation into a new and glorious kingdom.

"Is it far away?" asked Brand.

"No, it is close by," Guld replied, "though you have never seen it. It is ours if we will enter it. It is beautiful, wonderful; there is a sun by day and a moon by night."

They did not know what these words meant, but they did know that to their young king they signified beauty and wonder.

"It is all true what King Guld tells you," said Klein earnestly to one and another.

"We will think of it," said Peer; "we will give it earnest thought."

The rest said the same, for they could not yet grasp the full idea of the plan. They went silently away, and after them came the counsellors.

The counsellors were grey bearded and leaned on staves, all but Gurth who was still in full vigor. Uncle Bonn came with the others, but though he leaned on his staff his eyes were very bright and watchful. The counsellors came to urge the coronation.

"You are the king now," they said, "and you must wear the crown."

"I will wear it gladly," said Guld. "It will give me more power with the people."

"Oh! certainly, certainly," said the counsellors, and one of them added,

"A king without a crown is like a kobold without a cap!"

"And what that is, is a royal secret!" said Guld smiling. "But I want to have power with my people because I have come to lead them out into a new kingdom."

The oldest counsellor got up quickly and closed the door.

"There may be listeners," he said; "we must not let this go abroad!"

"This moment comes to all kings," said the next oldest counsellor. "We have to uphold them till the dream passes."

"Has it always passed?" asked Guld.

"Yes, but not always been forgotten. Kings crave light; that is why they have windows. The king's grandfather had the dream longest, and when the people would not follow him he went alone through the great gate and closed it behind him."

"That is the way I went and came," said Guld, "and that way I will lead you out to the green forests with the blue sky overhead, to the hillsides and the flocks and the wonderful light."

But the counsellors shook their heads. Only Gurth seemed somewhat moved, and Uncle Bonn's eyes were bright with understanding.

"We will have the coronation at once. That is enough to think about!" they said as they departed.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ONLY A SONG

“The gold fades
Upon the garments they were wont to wear.”

— WILLIAM MORRIS.

“Now,” said Rhea in the morning, “we will go up into the king’s castle and get the crown!”

She it was to whom the crown had been entrusted, and with her own hands she must deliver it to the counsellors. She went up the stairway, followed by Guld and Theda. The royal cousins looked with interest upon the massive walls and steps, and when they reached the little room with the window, Theda clapped her hands.

“How beautiful it is!” she said. But when Guld thrust back the vines to let the sunshine in, she cried: “Don’t! That makes it too light!”

The foster-mother now opened a second door, disclosing another stairway of pink and white marble. Up this they all went and at the top found themselves at the entrance of a noble hall with marble pillars. Here stood a golden throne.

Guld beheld it in silence.

“Here your father, the king, sat to give judgment,” said Rhea. “The people will rejoice when the great

gates are again open. They have waited a long time."

"Oh! it is grand to be a king!" cried Theda, with sparkling eyes.

"Yes!" said Guld under his breath.

"See me play king!" exclaimed Theda in her merry fashion, and running up the steps to the throne, she seated herself upon it, holding her head high and waving her hand with dignity.

"Come down, Theda!" said the foster-mother sharply. "That is not a clever prank!"

Theda obeyed her cheerfully, and then asked,

"Where is the crown, dame Rhea?"

"In the highest tower," replied Rhea. "We will go there now."

Opening a narrow door behind the throne, another stairway was revealed,—long, winding, and dimly lighted. Climbing this to the top, they reached a stronghold with small, irregular windows. Through one a cloud was seen, through another a gray ledge, and through the third a tree-top. There was a fourth window in which a piece of rock had been wedged so that the view was hidden.

"There was too much light and space there," explained Rhea, "if a kobold looked out, it made his head dizzy. So the counsellors closed it after the king went. Come here, Guld and Theda; I am going to open the chest."

The chest was of some dull metal and the lid was

heavy, but the three together lifted it, and there upon the royal robes lay the crown. It was made of hammered gold, curiously pointed, and rimmed with shining gems. Rhea lifted it out carefully.

"I must deliver it to the counsellors," she said.

"But what do I see in the chest?" asked Theda. "Oh! may I have them, Rhea? They are great blue stone beads, two of them!"

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Rhea. "Those are Guld's. I did not know there were any left. I thought they were all scattered. Give them to Guld at once!"

Theda held them out toward Guld, but he said lightly,

"Keep them if you like them! See, Theda, I am going to open the fourth window!"

It was hard to dislodge the wedged stone, but he moved it a little, and then pushed it to the floor.

"Oh! Guld, put it back!" entreated Rhea, holding the crown before her eyes to shut out the light which came flooding into the turret room.

"See!" cried Guld joyously. "See! our new kingdom is in full view! Now you know where it lies. Look, Theda!"

But Theda had turned her back and would not look.

"I am frightened!" she said; "let us go down from the turret, dame Rhea!"

Rhea started down the stairway bearing the crown,

with Theda close behind her. Guld followed more slowly, but without replacing the stone.

“Now,” said Guld, when they were again in the wing of the castle, “sing me the old song, Rhea. I have missed your singing.”

He threw himself down on a bear-skin before the sweet-scented fire to listen, and Rhea sang:

“‘The kobolds are busy with curious things,
They have wrought in darkness a crown for Kings.
He who would wear it and rule is bound
To dwell in rock caverns deep underground.
Brown are the roadways, the fields and the town,
And the king who leaves them must leave his gold
crown.
The kobolds may cling to their rock-bound walls
And seek the gloom of their mountain halls,
But when twelve blue beads hang on one strand,
A queen shall come laughing to kobold land.
Brown are the roadways, the fields and the town,
And the king who leaves them must leave his gold
crown.’”

Rhea’s voice faltered as she finished, and she said hastily,

“It is only a song!”

CHAPTER XXXV

TWELVE BEADS UPON ONE STRAND

“All is riddle and the key to a riddle is another riddle.”
—EMERSON.

Theda had a little box of carved white bone which was said to have belonged to her grandmother. In it were three blue stone beads, two of which had also belonged to her grandmother, and the third had been given to her by Hippa. This box she had brought with her to the castle, but it so happened that she had never shown it to the foster-mother nor to Guld. In fact she seldom thought of it herself.

But on the morning of the day of coronation she took the box out on the stone steps of the castle wing, and opened it to see whether the beads were like those which had been hidden under the crown and which Guld had told her to keep.

“They are almost exactly alike,” she said to herself, “and I will keep them together.”

They were indeed all of one shape, an inch long and half an inch in thickness, and were cut out of a fine blue stone, rudely carved, but the carving differed on each bead. The bead which Hippa had given her was on a slender leather string.

"Long enough to go around my neck and tie," said Theda to herself.

Then she threaded the other two beads and while she was pushing them back and forth on the string Guld came suddenly out of the dark road which led to the great-aunt's house, and found her there on the stone steps. He looked troubled.

"Theda," he said, "there are hardly half of my people who will go out with me."

"Why should they?" she asked. "They are in their own homes, busy and happy. O Guld, give it all up! One thing I will tell you, I am not going, not one step!"

She saw that he was disturbed, and she went on:

"Give it all up! This is your place, this is your kingdom, no matter what lies outside!"

"But that is our kingdom too," said Guld. "See what I found out there."

And he held up in his fingers a blue stone bead rudely carved. Theda looked quickly at her string to see if her five were all there.

"Oh! it is another," she cried joyously. "Where did you find it?"

"Under a golden-rod," he said, dropping it into her hand.

"Under a stick of gold?" she asked with her merry laugh.

"No, no! Flowers that live and grow and bloom," said Guld, but she could not understand him. She

threaded the bead on her string and now there were six.

"That one I kept separate because it was the last and the brightest," said Guld, "but I have more for you if you like them."

And from his pocket he took five beads,—Rhea's, the great-aunt's, Brand's, Groat's, and the one that had lain in the crystal cave.

"O Guld," exclaimed Theda in delight, "I love beads! May I have them all?"

"To be sure!" said Guld, and when she had strung them, he took them in his hand and they counted them together.

"Eleven!" said Theda.

At this moment, from the road leading towards Gurth's house, Peer came in sight. He had been among the people with messages from Guld.

"Fully one half refuse to leave the kingdom," he said.

Guld was silent, but the beads in his hand reminded Peer of something, and he fumbled in his trousers pocket, bringing out at last the stone bead which Rhea gave him that day, so long ago, when Guld won the race.

"This had better go with the rest," he said and he gave it to King Guld.

"Twelve!" exclaimed Guld, with brightening face, as he slipped the bead upon the string and gave the necklace to the Princess Theda.

Then he stood up, straight and glad.

"It is all clear now!" he said. "Hasten, Peer,
and bid the people be ready. The king goes,— the
queen remains!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

CORONATION DAY

"I want air and sunshine and blue sky,
The feeling of the breeze upon my face,
The feeling of the turf beneath my feet,
And no walls but the far-off mountain tops."

— LONGFELLOW.

"I called my chiefs to council
In the din of a troubled year,
For the sake of a sign ye would not see,
And a word ye would not hear."

— KIPLING.

In every house in kobold-land there was talk of King Guld and his wish to lead out the people. The miners were greatly excited, some of them longing to go while others openly declared that Guld should sit still upon his throne and not speak of such things. The wood-cutters almost forgot to cut wood, the potters in the work-room argued with one another, and the gem-seekers in the farthest regions came forth to get news.

Meanwhile messengers were speeding up and down the kingdom to announce the coronation of Guld. There was no tarrying. The counsellors received the jeweled crown from Rhea, the great stone gates

of the royal castle were thrown open, showing broad, massive steps leading upward. At the tenth step was a landing from which on either hand a stairway rose, both leading to the hall of the golden throne.

The gray old counsellors gathered upon the landing, in sight of all the crowd below, and Guld stood in the midst with Theda at his side. This he had insisted upon, saying that she, too, was of royal birth and his next of kin.

Then the oldest and grayest counsellor came forward bearing the crown and placed it upon Guld's head, saying in a deep, slow voice,

"We crown thee king!"

And all the counsellors proclaimed together,

"King Guld is king."

"I have seen three kings," said the oldest counsellor. May King Guld be the wisest and greatest of them all!"

Then all the crowd broke into cheers, hurrahing and waving caps, and shouting,

"Long live King Guld!"

Guld stepped forward on the landing, and when he began to speak silence fell. He stood straight and brave and his crown glistened.

"I am your king and leader," he said. "Our kingdom is vaster than you know. It reaches out in the sunlight and on the mountain side. I have made a journey for your sakes. I have seen the blue sky overhead, the sun and the stars. I have felt the invisible winds surging against me. I have seen tall

forests of beautiful green, where the tops reach the clouds, and where the birds sing. There is room for all our race out there on the mountain side in the sunlight. Here you are within and under the rocks and hills. There you will be outside and upon them. Come with me, out from these dark roads and impenetrable walls and overhanging roofs, into the free clear air, and we will build new homes and be a strong and happy people. I went out for your sake, for your sake I returned, and now we will go together!"

Guld paused, and a shout arose among the people, and a mixed clamor of voices.

"We will go! We will go!" cried some.

"We will not go!" cried others. The old counsellors stood together with troubled faces. Theda caught Guld's hand and held it tightly. Klein ran hither and thither in the crowd, saying to everyone who would listen,

"It is all true what King Guld tells you!"

Suddenly Brand's voice was heard, clear above the others.

"I have worked in the dark all my days," he said, "and now I will follow King Guld!"

Then Stein's voice arose:

"I am a son of the mines," he cried, "and in the mines I will remain!"

The clamor, mixed with cheers, continued and all were not of one mind.

"I see that there is a division," said Guld, speaking again. "None shall be forced to go, none shall

be forced to remain. I go, with those who will follow me, and over those who remain I appoint a ruler."

Then, taking the crown from his own head, he placed it upon the head of the Princess Theda.

"I crown thee queen!" he said, and turning towards the people he exclaimed:

"Queen Theda is queen!"

An uncertain murmur arose, which might have grown to loudly uttered displeasure, but Uncle Bonn stepped out from among the counsellors and shouted with all his fiery vigor,

"Long live Queen Theda!"

Half terrified, half smiling, Theda looked down upon the excited faces. The crown was upon her head, the string of twelve blue beads hung about her neck.

The crowd wavered, rallied, and then with sudden enthusiasm burst forth all together in cheers, and cries of,

"Long live Queen Theda!"

And so the song was come true:

"When twelve blue beads hang on one strand,
A queen shall come laughing to kobold land."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE GOING FORTH OF KING GULD

“ Across what mountains, and over what sea?
Which way? Which way?”

— PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

When Guld went out, and half the nation with him, the great gate of rock was closed fast behind them, so that if they had wished to return they could not, and no one could tell how it fared with them.

But before he went, he ordered the approach to the dens to be walled up with solid rock and also the old dangerous road to the mines. Then he bade good-bye to Rhea and Theda, saying,

“ Come when you are ready. The gate opens from inside.”

Among those who went with King Guld to the kingdom outside and upon the hills and rocks were kobolds from every nook and neighborhood, miners headed by Brand, wood-cutters led by Robin, wild-eyed gem-seekers brought into marching order by Kirt, and steady-handed workers following Peer. Gurth and his wife went also for love of King Guld, and Uncle Groat left his home behind the boulder and walked out leaning on his staff. Last of all,

resting upon Klein's shoulder, went the great-aunt, not once turning to look back at the dark road which led to her smoky house. Uncle Groat cried out at the sight of her,

"You here, neighbor?"

She answered in her own decided way, fixing her keen eyes upon him:

"Aye! I am tired of plotting and scheming and trying to be wise, old Groat! Out there I shall know no more than a child, and what little heart I have left belongs to Klein and to Guld, and that is the truth!"

She was the last one that went through, and then the great gate was closed fast.

Queen Theda sat upon the golden throne and in everything that came before her she did as she thought Guld would have done. All the kobolds living in the farthest dark regions she bade come to occupy the lighter parts from which so many had gone. She induced Stein and the remaining miners to come up and build new dwellings in the broad unused fields near the market-place. In all matters she consulted Uncle Bonn and the counsellors so that they were well pleased with her, but she always had her own way.

She lived in the royal castle and had Mata and Sada for handmaids. Rhea remained with her, for although Guld was so dear to her, yet she did not wish to go forth with him, and she had this in common with Theda that they both loved the castle and

the kingdom inside and under the hills. So they were very friendly together.

All went well in the kingdom, and yet things were not the same as before. The kobolds all had better homes and easier labors, and were more of one mind, but a new thought had been started among them and, even if they wished, they could not forget it. Whenever they found a spot where a ray of light stole softly in, they thought of the "outside." Besides, they missed their old friends and neighbors.

"But we must be true to Queen Theda!" said one and another, for they loved their queen.

Even the counsellors began to have a wistful look in their eyes, and seemed less sure of their own wisdom than formerly, but they said:

"We must be true to Queen Theda!"

Queen Theda was well satisfied. She loved the great castle with its marble stairs and pillars, and the old royal treasures which were brought to light pleased her. She liked to sit upon her golden throne and give orders that made her subjects happy, and when she laid her crown aside she liked to heap sweet-scented knots on the fire and rest on the mats before it, along with Mata and Sada. Now and then she asked Rhea to sing to them, but Rhea was always unwilling, though she spoke gently when she refused.

Sometimes Rhea was missing when Theda wanted her, and then Theda said to herself with a little smile,

"She has gone up the stairway!"

And sometimes when she went to seek Uncle Bonn

he was not to be found, and she smiled again and said to herself,

“He is in the cave with a sky!”

Once she saw Mog at the noon-spot, looking eagerly up to see where the light came from, and once she saw a tear in Mata’s eye.

Still Queen Theda herself was entirely happy in the royal castle, all save this one thing,—she would gladly have given up her jeweled crown to have her cousin Guld back again.

But he did not come and the days slipped by and a long time passed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OUTSIDE

“Christ keep the Hollow Land
All the summer-tide;
Still we cannot understand
Where the waters glide;
Only dimly seeing them
Coldly slipping through
Many green-lipped cavern mouths
Where the hills are blue.”

— WILLIAM MORRIS.

One night Queen Theda did not sleep well. A soft gray light entered her room from a window that was high out of reach, and she lay looking at it. At last she left her bed, and wandering into the royal hall, opened the door behind the throne and saw the same soft gray light upon the stairway that led to the tower. Up the steps she climbed, for the way looked pleasant to her and she was not afraid.

She reached the tower and found the window still standing open where Guld had called her to look out upon a new kingdom. This time the light was so dim and soft and there was so little to be seen that she was not afraid to look. The rocks and trees were not very different from those in the cave-woods, and

not more distinct. But far away before her there was a faint light that spread slowly and, as it grew, Theda could see more. She looked down a mountain side and over wonderfully wide, roofless plains. The distant light grew and broadened and color came into it such as she had seen in Rhea's roses.

There was rustling and singing in the trees, and the wind blew in Theda's face, and all the while it grew lighter.

"I hear voices!" she exclaimed suddenly, "and oh! I do believe I hear Klein whistling!"

"Queen Theda sleeps late!" said Rhea in the morning, when all in the castle were stirring and the royal breakfast was ready to be served.

But just as she bade Mata go to call her mistress, Queen Theda's quick, light step was heard, and she came down from the direction of the throne-room.

"O Rhea," she cried, "I have seen Guld!"

Rhea started, trembling, and Sada with eyes full of wonder, asked,

"How did he look?"

"He is taller than we knew him," said Theda, "and he springs from rock to rock more lightly. I saw Peer, too, and others. They came near me, but they never looked my way. They were on the rocks watching the growing light and the brightening colors. I called out, 'Guld! Guld! Come, speak to me through the window!' But the wind blew my voice away, and he did not turn nor move."

Queen Theda paused, and Mata said under her breath,

“I wish that I could see Peer.”

“What then, Queen Theda?” asked Rhea, with a thrill in her voice.

“All the while,” said Theda, “they looked at the growing light far away before them, brightening the mountains. I looked at it too, and, O Rhea, suddenly the whole heart of the flame came up over the mountains, a golden fire, and the golden arrowy light shot into my eyes, and I could not look again.”

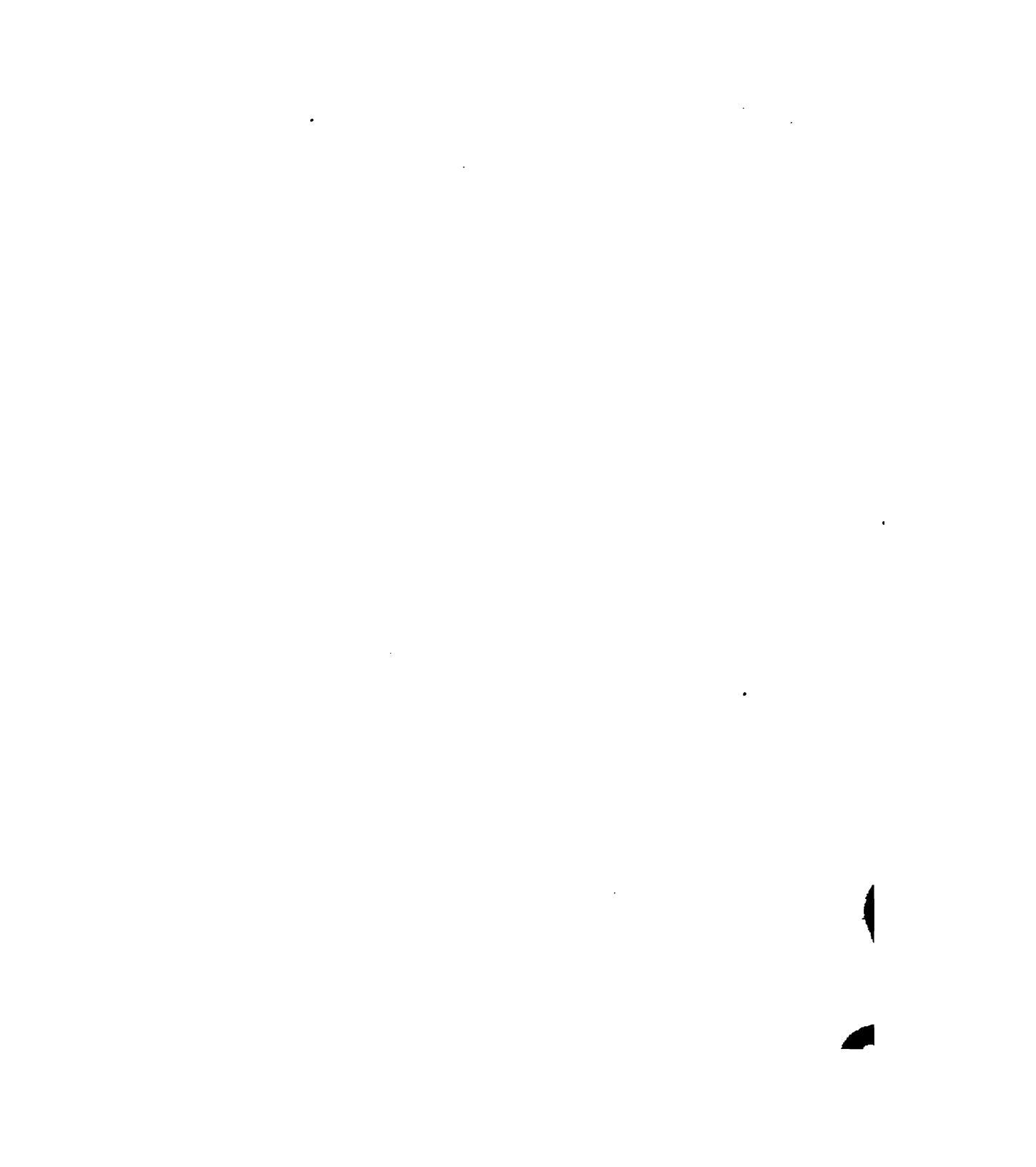
“May we go to see it?” asked the hand-maidens.

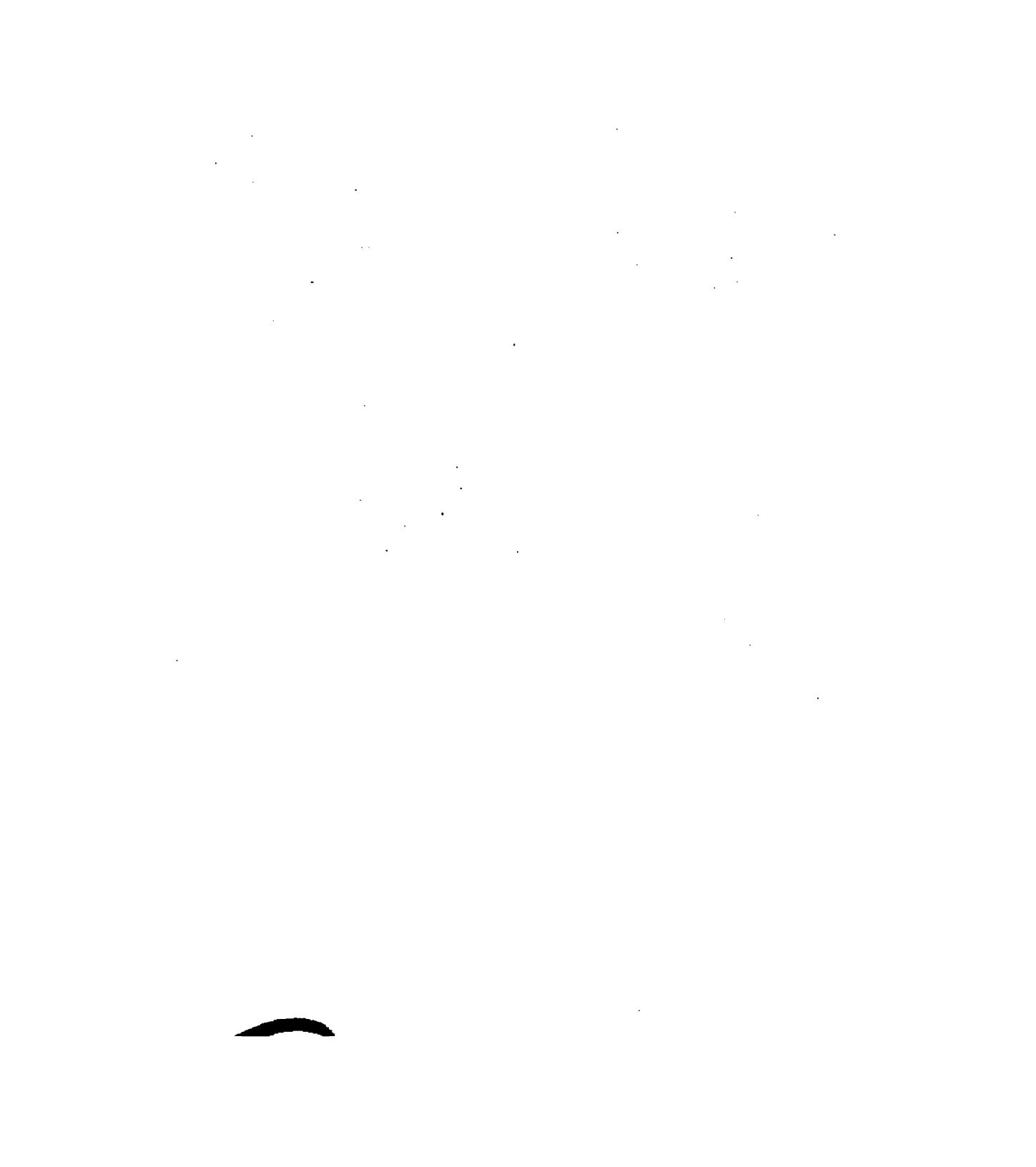
“Oh!” exclaimed Queen Theda, “I will give anything, do anything, go anywhere, to see that golden rosy light again! What was it that I saw, Rhea? Tell me! Let us go to find it and to find Guld!”

Rhea looked at Queen Theda steadfastly and tenderly,

“You saw the rising sun,” she said. “And now, if you will go, let us all go forth together!”









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